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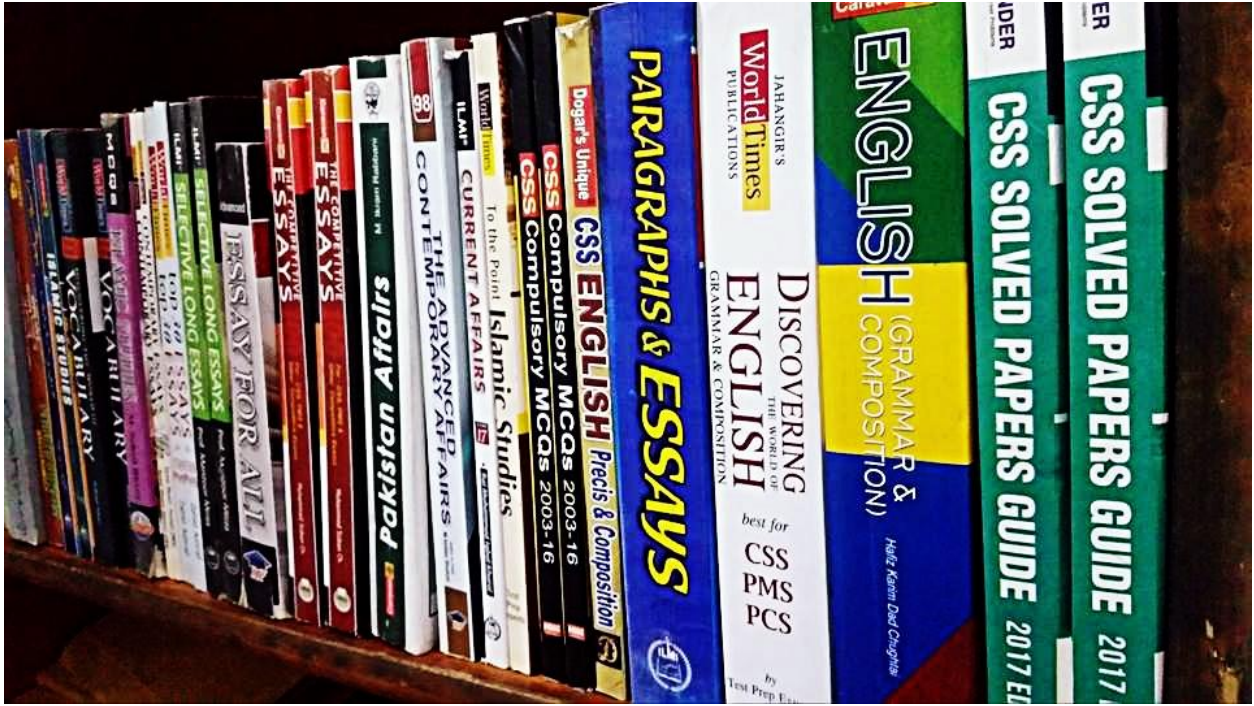
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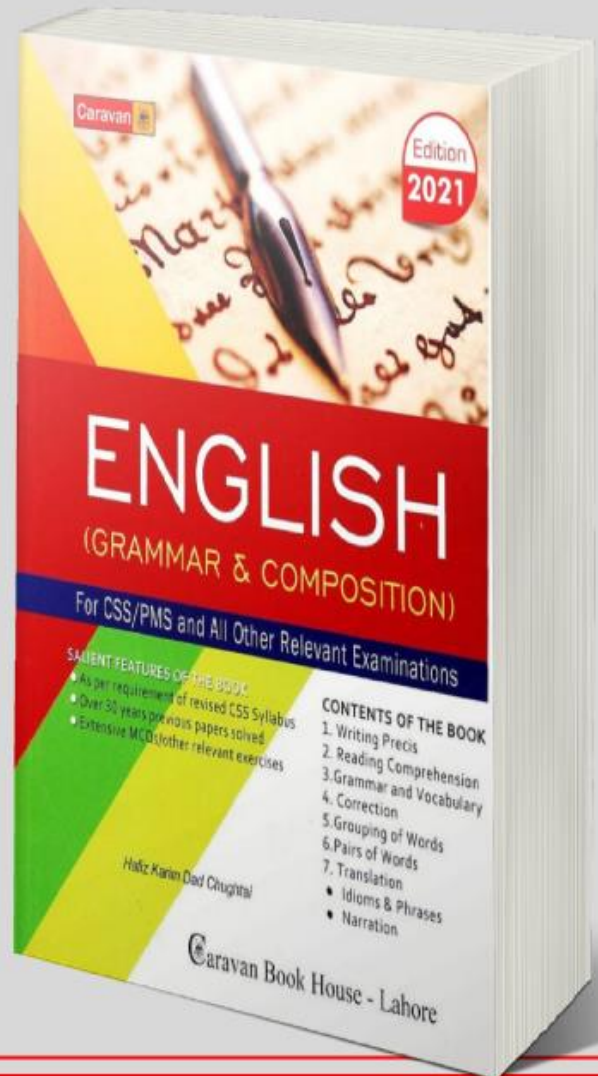
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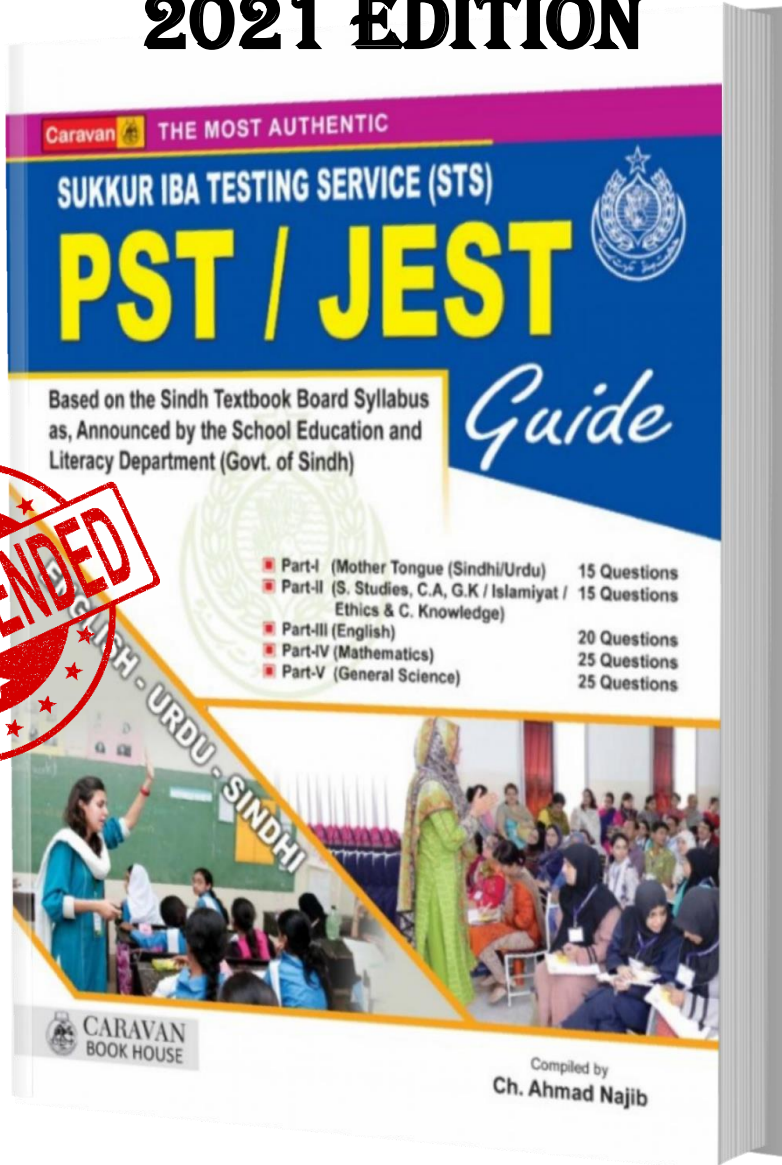
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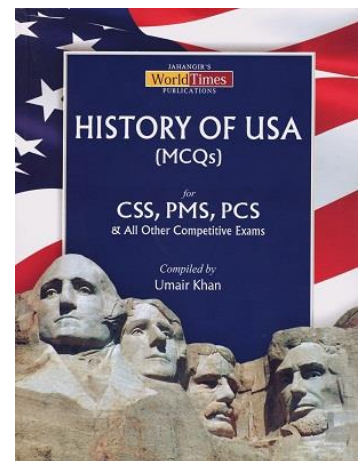
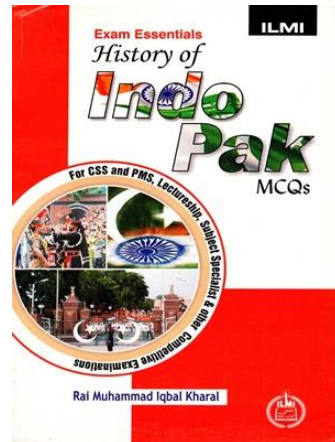
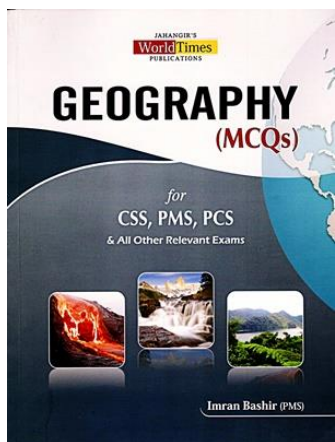
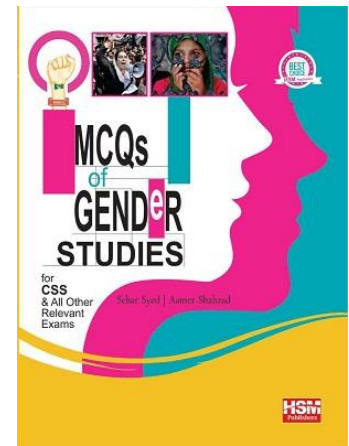
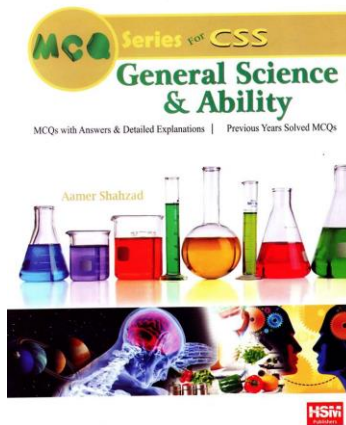
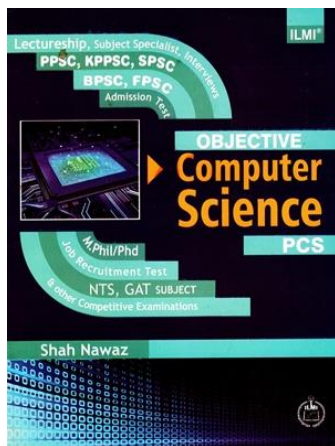
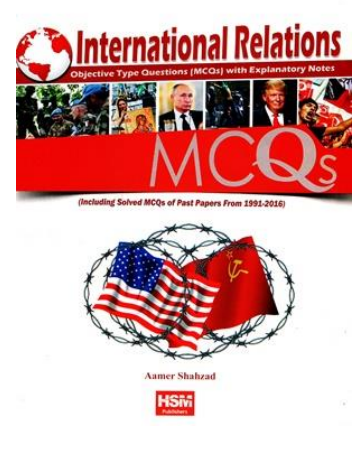
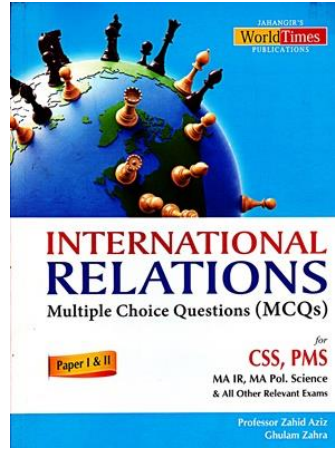
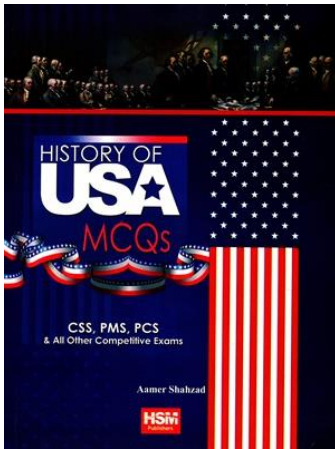


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PAKISTAN

Decoding the Pakistan-India Thaw By **Kamran Yousaf**

Two years ago, Pakistan and India were on the brink of a war. “We were on the verge of nuclear threshold” were the words of a senior security official, who had briefed a group of journalist two days after Pakistan shot down the Indian fighter plane.

But as Pakistan observed the second anniversary of Operation Swift Retort, are the two countries nearing another peace initiative?

On February 25, Pakistan and India, in an unprecedented and unexpected move, decided to honour the 2003 ceasefire agreement. Both put out a joint statement, agreeing to “address each other’s core issues/concerns which have propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence”. The announcement immediately triggered speculations that the agreement was the result of ‘backchannel’ contacts between India’s National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his Pakistani counterpart Dr Moeed Yousaf. One Indian media report claimed the two even met in a third country. Moeed, however, rejected the claim as baseless, insisting the LoC agreement came after direct negotiations between the military authorities of both countries.

But notwithstanding his rebuttal, such an agreement would not have been possible without approval from the highest level. The move may look dramatic but developments leading up to this announcement suggest it was not an out-of-the-blue decision. Relations between Pakistan and India continued to deteriorate over the past few years but the real dip started after the Pulwama incident, in February 2019. The situation worsened when India, on August 5, 2019, revoked the special status of occupied Kashmir.

By then, Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was hoping for better ties under Modi’s second term, lost all hopes and launched personal attacks against the Indian PM

often equating him with Hitler. He slammed Modi relentlessly till January 17 this year — the last time he did a scathing tweet against Modi. After that his Twitter handle suddenly stopped attacking Modi as a person. Similarly, on February 2, Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa gave a telling statement, offering India a resolution of the Kashmir dispute through a “peaceful and dignified manner”. He went on to say it was time to extend a hand of friendship to all directions.

Three days later, PM Imran offered an olive branch to India, stating his government was ready to take two steps forward if India took one. On February 23, despite hostilities, India permitted the PM’s special aircraft to use its airspace for a visit to Sri Lanka. On February 24, Indian army chief said unsettled borders were not in India’s interest, and New Delhi wanted peace at LoC and LAC. On the day Pakistan and India agreed to a ceasefire, the Indian external affairs ministry was more nuanced in its answer on the possibility of talks with Pakistan. “India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan. We have always maintained that we are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner,” the Indian MEA spokesperson said. For a change he did not opt for the usual rhetoric that talks could only take place in an environment “free from terror”. All these cannot be mere coincidence and appear to be well choreographed.

The question arises: why are the two countries now seeking a thaw? One explanation is that it has to do with the change of administration in the US. Also, India, despite its public claims of managing both fronts with Pakistan and China, wants to calm things at least with Pakistan. The ceasefire is seen as a relief for India that Pakistan will not take advantage of its standoff with China. This is the major concession India has been able to extract from Pakistan, according to Indian commentators. But what will Pakistan get or has got in return for this favour? We may get an answer in the coming days or weeks!

Published in The Express Tribune, March 1st, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2286819/decoding-the-pakistan-india-thaw>

Pakistan-US relations in the Biden Era By

Shahid Javed Burki

How will Pakistan fare during the Joseph Biden era that began on January 20, 2021, when the 46th President of the United States moved into the White House? The question is easy to answer at one level: there is no doubt that Islamabad's relations with Washington will be much better than they were when Donald Trump occupied the White House. In one of his first-of-the-year tweets, Trump called Pakistan all kinds of names. He may not have exactly used those words but for him Pakistan was devious, untrustworthy, a cheat and a liar. It had received billions of dollars from the US but given nothing in return. For Trump "return" translated as extreme pressure on the Taliban in Afghanistan to stop fighting against the Ashraf Ghani government in Kabul so that president Trump could pull out his troops from Afghanistan. This attitude sent Pakistan into the orbit of China. Is it likely to remain there?

There were other Trump interests that meant sidelining Pakistan. One of them was the preference for strong leaders. He was inclined to favour authoritarian rule over democratic dispensation. That was one of the reasons he was strongly in favour of leaders such as India's Narendra Modi who was taking his country step-by-step towards authoritarianism. One can say with confidence that whenever Biden turns his attention towards Pakistan, he is not likely to use the language his predecessor used.

Policy experts are studying with great interest the direction in which President Biden is likely to take the US. On what areas of the world and within them which countries the new president is likely to focus his attention on and that of his administration is indicated by the order in which he contacted on telephone the world leaders he will be working with to promote his country's strategic interests. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada was the first to be called. He was also the first with whom Biden had a virtual meeting in the White House. This was a clear departure from the way Trump had behaved towards Canada, the northern neighbour of the US with which the country has the longest border. He had openly spoken against the Canadian leader calling him weak and untrustworthy.

In the American system of policymaking a great deal of change occurs when power passes from one presidency to another. This is the case in particular if there is also a change in the political party that governs from the White House. Such a change occurred on January 20, when Trump vacated the White House and Biden moved in. Trump left no doubt that he was reluctant to leave; he continued to claim the election was stolen from him and that he was the clear winner but for the machinations of the Democratic Party. He encouraged his followers to take matters into their hands and block the Congress from certifying Biden and Kamala Harris as the winners of the presidency and the vice-presidency. Accepting his advice, hundreds of Trump supporters broke into the Capitol building on January 6, earning for that day a place in the country's history when the American democracy was near collapse. In the mayhem that followed five people died including an officer of the Capital Police force.

Trump continued his defiance and departed from the traditions established over 250 years of American democracy when the outgoing president not only attended the inauguration ceremony of the one coming in but also welcomed him to the White House. Trump did neither. He flew out of Washington and went to his estate in Florida while Biden was being sworn in. On his first day in office, President Biden signed a number of executive orders that reversed some of the positions his predecessor had taken affecting America's international relations. What would be the new President's approach to Pakistan?

It is unlikely that President Biden would concern himself directly with Pakistan. His policy towards Islamabad will be the sum total of how he handles Pakistan's immediate neighbours. Islamabad's approach to Washington, therefore, would be reactive rather than active. The US has deep interest in all four neighbours with which Pakistan shares its borders. Beginning with Afghanistan, Biden has asked his colleagues working in the area of foreign policy to study the US-Afghan relations over the last two decades. The peace deal Trump's America signed with the Taliban on February 29, 2020 had a number of markers. The one of critical importance is the May 1 deadline by which America was committed to pull out its entire military contingent out of Afghanistan. The US has been bringing back its personnel since February 29, 2020; by the time Biden arrived in the White House, only 2,500 soldiers were left in the country. In his conversation with General Frank McKenzie, the head of America's Central Command, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, pointed out that his country did not wish to see the repeat of 1988-89 when first the Soviet Union and then

the US withdrew from Afghanistan. The result was utter chaos the consequences of which are still being felt in Pakistan.

Going clockwise we get to China — the world's second largest economy and possibly also the second strongest military power. Under President Xi Jinping who has been in power since 2012, China has become assertive, particularly in its neighbourhood. It is aggressively projecting its economic and military power. This did not sit well with former president Trump and also worries his successor. Relations between Washington and Beijing are likely to remain tense. This has consequences for Pakistan which moved into China's orbit to counter Trump's undisguised hostility.

Next in line is India with which president Trump had developed a close relationship. This was because of Trump Organization's deep economic interest in India and also the former president's preference for strong leaders. As already noted, in Prime Minister Modi, Trump saw the type of authoritarian leader he liked to deal with. While Biden has not shown his hand with respect to India and South Asia, the liberal press in his country which he reads with great interest has become wary of the direction in which Modi's India is moving. What troubles the press was described as "Mr Modi's Assault on Dissent", in an editorial by The Washington Post. Noting some of the moves by the Indian Prime Minister, the newspaper recognised that while "Indian society remains robust, the question is whether it will be enough to check Mr Modi's drift toward autocracy."

Finally, we arrive at Iran with which the US has had a difficult relationship since the 1979 Islamic Revolution when emperor Raza Shah Pahlavi, a close friend of the US, was replaced by clerics who labeled America as the "Great Satan" and defied it in the waters of the Persian Gulf. On a few occasions, Trump having pulled out of the nuclear deal president Barack Obama had signed with Tehran, was at a near-war situation with Iran. The hostility was encouraged by Israel and Saudi Arabia. How Pakistan develops its approach towards Biden's America would be determined by how the latter behaves in the former's neighbourhood.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 1st, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2286827/pakistan-us-relations-in-the-biden-era>

Pakistan-China 70 Years of Growing Together By Shakeel Ahmad Ramay

Pakistan-China relationship cannot be understood by applying conventional theories or conceptual frameworks of diplomacy and international relation. The relationship is unique, wide-ranging and encompasses all fields of life. It is based on two inimitable ingredients, love and care, which are scarce commodities in international relation. It is not mere statement, history is full of events and incidents, where both countries exhibited the strength of their relationship and uniqueness. They stood by each other no matter what the situation was.

The journey of relationship started right after the establishment of China. Howbeit, the strong footing was provided by the first interaction between Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in 1955 at the Non-alignment conference. The meeting paved the way for future interaction and relationship. Again, being foreign minister of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Bogra led the efforts to conclude the boundary agreement between China and Pakistan. Thus, Muhammad Ali Bogra is considered the mastermind from Pakistani side to steer the relationship. Since then, Pakistan and China are together in multiple fields but well-being of people through economic cooperation is prime area of relationship.

The economic cooperation started way back in 1952 through a trade transaction of US\$ 86 million (Pakistani export US\$84 million). The trade agreement in 1963 was second major event. It was also important because it was signed right after the boundary agreement. Along the course of time, Pakistan and China kept on signing agreements on cooperation in different sectors like agreement on cultural cooperation 1965, science and cultural cooperation 1976 and education exchanges 1983 etc. China also provided Pakistan different types of grants and loans. First loan of US\$ 60 million was provided in 1965. Pakistan was also offered loans of US\$ 217 million during the period of 1970-75. China also provided the textile machinery to promote textile industry.

Pakistan and China always keep on looking for avenue to enhance cooperation. The cooperation is always followed the principle of win-win cooperation

The major milestone on economic front was achieved in 1989. Pakistan-China signed an agreement of “promotion and protection of investments” to enhance the investment and economic cooperation. It led to first major investment in Pakistan from China. Huawei in 1998 opened its operations in Pakistan. Since then it is leading player in the field of technology. It is also one of the major taxpayers, as it paid US\$ 43 million in 2018. It is also contributing in job creation and employed 16000+ Pakistanis. The indirect contribution in jobmarket is also substantial and it contributed 25000 indirect jobs. Haier Pakistan was next company to invest in Pakistan. It started its operations in 2001. It gave a new dimension to home appliances industry in Pakistan. It has created thousands of the job and opportunities for Pakistanis.

Zong Pakistan, which is part of China mobile is a big name in telecommunication market of Pakistan. It has revolutionized the mobile communication in Pakistan. It is biggest provider of data services and PTA highlighted that the Zong hold 55 percent share. It is also leading player of 4-G services. The investment of Zong has reached the level of US\$ 2.2 billion in 2018, which is on increasing mode.

It is also believed among wider community that the investment agreement of 1989, also paved the way for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As, right after the signing the agreement both countries started to enhance cooperation in multiple economic fields. Government and non-government entities started to investment in Pakistan. Both governments also started to finalize trade agreements, energy cooperation, agriculture collaboration and science and technology cooperation. High level exchanges between the countries started to put more efforts to finalize different economic agreements.

Howbeit, the real impetus was provided by the Beijing Declaration, which was signed by President Musharraf and President Hu Jintao in 2003 in Beijing. In 2004 Pakistan and China signed preferential trade agreement to foster the trade. Simultaneously Pakistan and China started to negotiate the free trade agreement which concluded with signing the first FTA. President Musharraf again visited China in 2006 and signed multiple MoUs. President Hu Jintao visited Pakistan in 2006 and both countries agreed to enhance cooperation in diverse fields. The visit ended with signing two landmark agreements 1) Free Trade Agreement and 2) Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation. In 2009, both countries also signed the FTA on services.

Pakistan and China kept on working closely to enhance the cooperation. In 2013, Prime Minister Li Keqiang of China, visited Pakistan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Prime Minister Li Keqiang finalized the comprehensive framework of economic cooperation. In 2015, President Xi Jinping came on state visit to Pakistan. He started his visit by declaring Pakistan and China iron brother. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was launched during his visit. It is a multidimensional initiative, which has been designed by keeping in mind the needs of Pakistan. Pakistan and China jointly developed the long-term plan of CPEC. The long-term plan includes 1) Connectivity, 2) Energy, 3) Trade and industrial parks, 4) Agriculture development and poverty alleviation, 5) Tourism, 6) Cooperation in connecting people's livelihoods and non-government exchanges and 7) Financial cooperation. The second free trade agreement was also signed in 2019. The focus of agreement is to create special opportunities to enhance trade.

Pakistan and China even continued to enhance cooperation during the COVID-19, when whole world was on hold. In March 2020, during the visit of President Arif Alvi, both countries signed two MoUs; 1) Agriculture Cooperation and 2) Science and Technology Cooperation. Agriculture MoU includes in 1) technology transfer, 2) capacity building for R&D 3) trade development, 4) agro-industry, 5) business development and 6) livestock and dairy industry development. Science and Technology MoU has been signed by keeping in sight the fourth industrial revolution and needs of Pakistan. Both countries are still working to enhance the cooperation.

The analysis of cooperation highlights few important things. First, economic cooperation always remained the prime area of focus between two countries. It is pertinent to mention here this because the opponents always tried to ignore the economic dimension and try to only focus on security cooperation. Second, Pakistan and China always keep on looking for avenue to enhance cooperation. Third, the cooperation was always followed the principle of win-win cooperation. Fourth, diversification is important element.

However, the most important aspect of cooperation is that it keeps growing with growing of countries. For example, after the 1978 reforms China started to emerge as major country at global level. As China continue to grow, China continued to enhance investment in Pakistan, to help Pakistan to grow. First glimpse came in 1989, which culminated with signing of CPEC in 2015. Now,

Pakistan is one major investment hub for China. The investment is being designed to help Pakistan to come out of economic crises and emerge as a stable and economically sound country.

Hence, it can be concluded that 70 years of Pakistan-China relationship are 70 years of growing together.

The writer is Director, Asia Study Center SDPI

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/731010/pakistan-china-70-years-of-growing-together/>

US Seeks Pakistan's Help Over New 'Afghan Peace Plan' By Kamran Yousaf

ISLAMABAD: The US special envoy for Afghanistan shared with Pakistan the new strategy of the Biden administration, seeking national elections under the transitional Afghan government, officials said on Monday.

The contours of the new strategy were on top of the agenda when Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad held talks with Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi.

Khalilzad was accompanied by General Austin Miller, commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, and other officials while General Qamar was assisted by DG Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, Pakistan special envoy on Afghanistan Muhammad Sadiq and PM Special Assistant on National Security Dr Moeed Yusuf.

Khalilzad's visit, first under the Biden administration, came against the backdrop of desperate attempts by the US to seek a political end to the war in Afghanistan. Khalilzad flew from Doha where he held talks with the Afghan Taliban.

Earlier, he was in Kabul where he shared the road map developed by the Biden administration to advance the peace process.

Similarly, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinkin wrote a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, outlining a four-point plan for the Afghan endgame. The plan includes a UN sponsored meeting of foreign ministers of Pakistan, Iran, Russia, US, China and India to adopt a 'unified approach' on Afghanistan.

The Afghan government was given specific proposals envisaging a new inclusive government leading to comprehensive ceasefire.

In Rawalpindi, Khalilzad, as per official sources, briefed the Pakistani side about the new proposals.

The statement issued by the military's media wing, however, provided little insight into the meeting. "Matters of mutual interest, regional security and the ongoing Afghanistan reconciliation process were discussed.... The visiting dignitary greatly appreciated Pakistan's role in the ongoing peace process," read the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) official handout.

The sources, meanwhile, said Ambassador Khalilzad sought Pakistan's help in advancing the peace process under the new strategy developed by the Biden administration.

The new US plan is aimed at breaking the deadlock in the slow moving peace negotiations with a road map for a future Afghan government with Taliban representation, a revised Afghan constitution using the current one as an "initial template" and terms for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

The New York Times which obtained the copy of the proposals reported that the Biden administration called for national elections after the establishment of a "transitional peace government of Afghanistan". The Taliban reportedly rejected the idea of fresh elections, calling them as western interference.

Khalilzad is believed to have requested Pakistan to use its leverage over the Taliban to get the process move forward.

The new US government after taking charge decided to review the Doha deal the Trump administration had signed with the Taliban in February 2020. The deal provides a road map for the US troops' withdrawal in return for the Taliban not allowing Afghan soil to be used again by the terrorists as well as entering into the intra-Afghan talks.

Under the agreement, all US and other international forces are to leave Afghanistan by May 1. The Biden administration and the Nato countries, which also have troops presence in Afghanistan, indicated that they might not stick to the plan.

The Taliban have been accused of violating the terms of agreement and the US and Nato insisted that troops drawdown is conditioned based.

But the letter written by the US secretary of state suggested that the Biden administration has not ruled out the possibility of leaving Afghanistan by May 1.

Observers believe that the Biden administration appears to think that the Ghani administration is creating impediments to the peace deal and hence it has been given a clear message that the US might leave Afghanistan if Kabul did not respond positively to the new plan.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2288185/us-seeks-pakistans-help-over-new-afghan-peace-plan>

Achievements of Radd-ul-Fasaad By Masud Ahmad Khan

It was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which reshaped the future of the region by changing its dynamics. The west planned the largest covert operation to defeat the former Soviet Union. The invasion led to a mass uprising in Afghanistan which resulted in the killing of 1.5 million people as over 6 million fled to Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan allied itself with the US in the war on terror and provided a logistic base to support the NATO forces. After 9/11 Pakistan itself became the victim of terrorist attacks by militants who found refuge in erstwhile FATA.

The first major operation launched by Pakistan was Operation al-Mizan from 2002 to 2006. The terrorist attacks claimed the lives of thousands of innocent Pakistanis as well as of security personnel. In June 2014, Operation Zarb-e-Azb was launched in the former North Waziristan Agency to clear it from terrorists. Azb refers to one of the seven swords of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that was carried along during the battle of Uhad and Badar. Terrorists groups in that region were seen a major cause of terrorist attacks across Pakistan. 4000 square kilometers of land in the agency was cleared and over 19,000 Intelligence Based Operations (IBOs) were carried out. Ultimately, the operation was a success and was praised by the international community.

Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad was launched on February 22, 2017, to consolidate the gains of other operations. Another reason for its launch was the resurgence of fresh terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The aim was to indiscriminately eliminate 'residual threats' that remained from other operations so that the security of Pakistan's borders could be achieved. Radd-ul-Fasaad—meaning elimination of strife or rejection of violence—was undertaken after one and a half year of the conclusion of Zarb-e-Azb. It was the continuation of the National Action Plan (NAP) and it completed 4 years on February 22, 2021. According to DGISPR, more than 375,000 IBOs were conducted in the last four years. 34,000 operations were conducted in Punjab, 150,000 in Sindh, over 80,000 in Balochistan and more than 72,000 in KP. 78 terrorist organisations were targeted and their assets were frozen.

In May 2018, through a landmark legislation, FATA was merged with KP. Radd-ul-Fasaad brought peace in the country and broke the spine of terrorism. The rapid decline in terrorist attacks is an indicator of the operation's success. Development projects worth billions of rupees have been executed through the Pakistan army. It also monitors schools and hospitals to improve education and health facilities. Furthermore, the army is also involved in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of tribal districts and has also established technical institutions. The army started fencing western border in May 2018 to stop terrorists from crossing into Pakistan. This is a project worth 532 million dollars—including the construction of out posts and employment of a high technical surveillance system. 83 percent of western border has been fenced and the remaining will be completed by the end of the year.

Pakistan, once considered the breeding ground for terrorism, has been declared the only country in the world who combated terrorism successfully. According to the UN Secretary General, "Pakistan's successful journey from fighting terrorism is remarkable, and it is welcoming that the state has re-established its writ over the regions affected by terrorism". According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) there is 90 percent decrease in deaths related to terrorist incidents. Pakistan has now become a safe country and tourists are pouring in from across the globe. In case of Gilgit-Baltistan, in the past four to five years, there has been an unprecedented boom in tourism. In 2016, domestic tourists increased from 50,000 to 5 lac. In 2017, the figure was one million and in 2019 the figure was 2 million. The Global Peace Index declared Gilgit-Baltistan as one of the most peaceful regions.

Given that Pakistan is home to five of the fourteen highest peaks in the world, dozens of climbers from countries including Nepal, USA, Iceland and Spain came in the hopes of summiting. In fact, Nepali climbers set a new world record by becoming the first to reach the summit of K2 in the winters. This was all possible because of Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad which helped improve the law and order situation. Even international cricket has returned to Pakistan since the unfortunate attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in 2009.

The world has commended the improved security situation in Pakistan and its affects for regional peace and stability. COAS Gen. Bajwa, while meeting with elders in North Waziristan, recently said that we have to remain vigilant and steadfast to thwart hostile attempts to create chaos and reverse the gains of

operation Radd-ul-Fasaad. Pakistan has paid a huge price in the global war on terrorism as more than 70,000 Pakistanis and lost their lives. Salute to the armed forces of Pakistan and other law enforcing agencies for their sacrifices for achieving peace in the country.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/15-Mar-2021/achievements-of-radd-ul-fasaad>

Strategic Shift in Pakistan's Foreign Policy

By Kamran Yousaf

When the PTI government came to power in August 2018, Pakistan had to reach out to its friends in the Gulf seeking a financial bailout package to shore up the country's depleting foreign exchange reserves. Prime Minister Imran Khan had to travel twice to Saudi Arabia. The hectic diplomatic efforts did pay off when Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced a bailout package. PM Imran went on national television and announced that Pakistan had prevented a major economic crisis thanks to its "friends". But that was not the full story. Asking for money even from your friends has never been a pleasant experience. And the PM's adviser on commerce, Abdul Razzak Dawood, who accompanied the PM on those visits, recently revealed how embarrassing it was for the country to ask for help. "I know the pain this government went through right at the start when we had to go to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and put our hand out. Where is your national security, where is your influence when you have to ask to be saved? It is pretty embarrassing," Dawood said in a candid speech at the Islamabad Security Dialogue.

The context of his statement was to highlight the fact that countries which lacked economic security often ended up compromising their sovereignty. The bailout package by these 'friendly countries' certainly came at a cost. It was because of these reasons that Pakistan could not sustain Saudi pressure on the Kuala Lumpur Summit. These reality checks and others appear to have compelled the country's decision-makers to revisit Pakistan's foreign policy. It is often said that Pakistan's foreign policy remained security-driven and we have given little emphasis on leveraging our economic potential. But it is impossible to realise our true economic potential without bringing a shift in our policies. For long, there has been a debate in Pakistan regarding whether we should embark on trade and economic ties without first resolving the longstanding Kashmir dispute. At least the PPP and PML-N, in their last stints in power, tried to improve trade and economic ties while simultaneously seeking the resolution of Kashmir. However, because of a lack of consensus, both parties had to face resistance from the concerned quarters.

But at the Islamabad Security Dialogue, the keynote speeches by PM Imran and Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa clearly showed that there now seems to be a greater realisation that without economic prowess Pakistan will not achieve its foreign policy goals. It was because of this shift in approach that both the PM and the Army Chief sounded conciliatory towards India. The Army Chief's statement was significant where he stated that it was "time to bury the past and move forward". The PM said that India would have to take the first step to create a conducive environment for the resumption of talks. What is significant is that Pakistan appears to be no more asking the reversal of Article 370 or at least linking it with the resumption of talks. The conducive environment means that India needs to lift restrictions on occupied Kashmir, and release political prisoners, etc.

There is also a change in tone and tenor of Indian officials towards Pakistan. India has its own strategic reasons to change its approach. Over a year-long border standoff with China has made New Delhi realise that the two-front situation is not tenable. Nevertheless, the shift in Pakistan's approach focusing on the economy is necessitated by harsh realities. We must ask ourselves: are we making peace overtures today from a position of strength, compared to, let's say, similar passages of the peace process in 1998, 2004 and even at the start of the first term of the Modi government?

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Unfinished Agenda of Jinnah's Pakistan By **Malik Tariq Ali**

MUSLIM League was established as a political party at Dacca in 1906, at a meeting headed by Nawab Waqar-ul-Mulk and Nawab Mohsin-i-Mulk where it was formally proposed by Nawab Salimullah Khan and supported by others like Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Zafar Ali Khan etc.

March 23 will always be a date of historical significance in the struggle for freedom from British Colonial Raj and the creation of Pakistan under the dynamic leadership of Quaid-i-Azam MAJ and other pioneers of the political struggle waged by politicians on platform of All India Muslim League.

Earlier on 23 March 1931 Bhagat Singh, a freedom fighter was executed in Lahore after a sham trial by a British judge.

It was again in Lahore on 23 March that a resolution was adopted at Lahore's Manto Park, adjacent to Lahore Fort, in an open session under the presidency of Quaid-i-Azam, which laid the foundations for creation of Pakistan on 14 August 1947.

It is unfortunate that even after a lapse of over seven decades MAJ's vision of a modern democratic welfare state has not been realized.

Jinnah understood the diversity of various units that formed Pakistan and the importance of a constitution to be adopted in his address to the First Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947.

Unfortunately, after his tragic demise the remnants of the British Raj in connivance with paid bureaucracy took over this country, ignoring his advice to paid servants of the state given on 14 June 1948 at Quetta, where Mr Jinnah told them about the importance of oath to the constitution and that they had no political role in running affairs of the country.

It is a brutal reality that the All India Muslim was alone in the political struggle for the creation of a separate homeland where Muslim majority could live in peace with members of other faiths and ethnicities.

The only formidable political group which supported Quaid was led by Jogendra Nath Mandal, a leader of Hindu Dalits from Bengal and his group of legislators in Bengal Legislature which voted to join Pakistan, when many other Muslims voted against.

In 1940 Mandal became a minister in the cabinet of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy.

When rioting broke out in 1946 in East Bengal, he urged the Dalits not to participate in violence against Muslims, whom he perceived to be victims, like his own community, of hatred by upper caste Hindu.

MAJ appointed him as Pakistan's First Law Minister and he was also nominated by the Quaid as one of five representatives in the Interim Government of India in October 1946.

It is also a bitter fact that even after 1946 elections, when Muslims had a numerical majority in Punjab, the Unionist Party led by Khizr Hayat tried to form a coalition with Congress and Akali in March, which did not materialize because Akalis pulled out. This was the final nail in the coffin of the Unionist Party in Punjab.

MAJ arrived in Lahore on 21 March 1940 and a grand reception was planned for him.

Unfortunately, without any warning, Allama Mashriqi's Khaksar Tehreek, which had never supported Quaid, had a violent confrontation with Unionist Party Premier Punjab Sikandar Hayat led government on 19 March, which resulted in many casualties and fatalities.

There was a violent clash with police at Bhatti Gate and a British police officer was killed and many injured.

Later on, hundreds of police enforcement arrived and the Khaksars were mercilessly brutalized with scores of fatalities.

This evoked anger amongst Muslims living in the walled city, who vented their anger against Sikandar Hayat.

The situation became so critical that Sikandar phoned MAJ to postpone the planned session of AIML at Lahore.

However, Quaid was adamant that the historic meeting would go ahead as planned.

Sceptics have doubts that this could be a conspiracy to delay this meeting.

On 22 March, an Open Session of AIML was held at Lahore where Quaid delivered a presidential address highlighting political developments in preceding two years viz-a-viz activities of Congress and British government and League's policy about the war in Europe.

While elaborating about Two-Nation Theory, he made a reference to a letter written by Lala Lajpat Rai to Bengal's C R Das in 1924, where the former stated that Hindus and Muslims are two separate nations and they can never form part of one united nation.

Events in India under Modi's government where Hindu supremacist have gone on a rampage killing Muslims, raping their women and taking over their lands are testimony to the vision of MAJ and other pioneers of freedom struggle waged by AIML.

Earlier Allama Iqbal had elaborated that the destiny of Muslims lies in creation of a separate homeland.

A draft resolution was prepared by 21 members of Working Committee comprising Liaquat Ali Khan, Nawab Ismail, Malik Barkat Ali, Haji Abdullah Haroon, Maulana Zafar Ali, Nawab Mamdot, etc, which proposed that " Geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in NW and NE zones

should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units should be autonomous and sovereign”.

Allama Iqbal had in 1929 unambiguously declared the units which today comprise Pakistan by name Sind, Balochistan, Frontier, Punjab etc in NW India.

Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, Joint Secretary Punjab ML did raise an objection to unambiguously specify names of units, but he was overruled by Liaquat Ali Khan.

It was decided by Quaid that resolution would be presented on 23 March by Maulana Fazal I Haq, supported by Ch Khaliquz Zaman and seconded by one person from each federating unit of India with a Muslim population namely Ibrahim Ismail Chundrigar from Bombay, Abdul Rauf from CP, Abdul Hameed Khan from Madras, Aurangzeb Khan from Frontier, Qazi Essa from Baluchistan, Abdul Mateen Chaudhry from Assam, Nawab Ismail from Bihar and Maulana Zafar Ali Khan from Punjab.

—The writer is contributing columnist, based in Lahore.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/unfinished-agenda-of-jinnahs-pakistan-by-malik-tariq-ali/>

The Two-Nation Reality Versus Theory By **Javed Jabbar**

Just three days after Pakistan observes March 23 as the Pakistan Day to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Lahore Resolution in 1940, Bangladesh observes March 26 as its own Independence Day. The proximity of these two historic dates — March 23 and 26 — highlights the contrasting contexts through which the two countries that once together represented a single entity view them.

In 2021 there is special celebration because it marks the 50th year of that country's independence. It was on that day in 1971, when General Yahya Khan, who was the president and the commander-in-chief of Pakistan Army at the time, committed the second catastrophic error of that year by launching Operation Searchlight.

The aim of the operation was to crush the non-violent but also violent civil disobedience movement of the Awami League that had begun on March 1 in response to the first catastrophic blunder by the same general; the last-minute postponement of the first session of the newly-elected National Assembly set for March 3. That first error was compounded by the failure to specify a fresh date. This came five days later and set March 25 for the session. By then, however, trust had been totally shattered.

For the record, the same General Yahya Khan took three wise, progressive actions in 1970. Two of them directly benefitted Bengali East Pakistanis. The first was the decision to hold elections on the basis of one-adult-one-vote. This would accurately reflect the fact that the majority of the country's population lives in East Pakistan, a fact not previously electorally recognised. The second action was the conduct of the elections themselves in December 1970 on a free and fair basis which alone enabled the massive victory for the Awami League. The third positive action was the abolition of One Unit in West Pakistan and the restoration of the four provinces in what at the time was West Pakistan.

The first of the two dates, March 23, is a landmark in the continuing evolution of Muslim nationalism in South Asia and the struggle for a new nation-state in Muslim-majority regions, East and West. The Lahore Resolution was formally

introduced by Fazlul Haq, a veteran leader of Bengal. The second date, March 26, is when the descent into disintegration began of the nation-state established on August 14, 1947. This occurred nine months later on December 16, 1971. That change was enforced only because India's armed forces — hugely outnumbering the under-resourced Pakistani forces — blatantly violated the territorial sovereignty of East Pakistan on November 21, 1971.

Yet, despite that surgical separation, there remains a binding umbilical cord between the two parts that were previously together for over 24 years. That chord is the basic thematic synergy between the two dates. They have become enduring milestones to mark the predominantly Muslim national identities of both Pakistan and Bangladesh. Though there are multiple definitions of what constitutes a 'nation', there is also unanimity that nations certainly exist.

Even before the violent conflict of nine months, Bengali East Pakistanis had justifiably felt they were the victims of discrimination by West Pakistanis. Though significant development took place in East Pakistan after independence, the quantum was not enough to make up in only 24 years for the long neglect of Bengal for about 200 years — first by the British East India Company and then by the British government itself.

Rejection of state, not Muslim identity

On March 26 and December 16, 1971, East Pakistan rejected the state structure of the original edifice of Pakistan. However, by becoming Bangladesh, the people of what once used to be East Bengal reaffirmed with passion their abiding belief in the Two-Nation Reality; that Muslims and Hindus are two distinct, separate nations. Neither in 1971 nor today in 2021 does Bangladesh want to reunite itself with Hindu West Bengal. Nor does it want to be absorbed into India. The pride the people of Bangladesh feel about being Muslims is fully evident in Article 2A of their Constitution. While aptly recognising the equal respect owed to other religions, Article 2A begins with the categorical statement: "The state religion of the Republic is Islam ..."

By dictionary-definition, a theory is a "supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something ..." In practical terms, reality comes before theory. Because a theory seeks to 'explain' what already exists. Gravity, for instance, existed long before Newton formulated the theory.

Muslims of South Asia — notwithstanding their numerous internal diversities of languages and ethnicities — were long possessed of a sense of being a nation, co-existing with a broad Hindu nation — with its own vast internal diversities — in the same region.

Historic origins

The evolution of the Two-Nation Reality has been taking place in two major dimensions and phases. The first dimension is territorial and pre-Muslim. It began about 7,000 years ago with Mehrgarh in Balochistan preceding Moenjodaro in Sindh by about 2,000 years as part of the Indus Valley civilisation, which gave way to the ascent of Buddhism as seen in Taxila and Swat. Except for about 700 years (Mauryan BC — Turko-Mughal-British) the areas that now constitute Pakistan were autonomous, locally-ruled or mostly dominated by forces from West and Central Asia.

The second phase commenced about 1,300 years ago. It added a new religious Muslim dimension to the territorial, ancestral, cultural heritages already there, later blending with mass migration from the east of the Indus post-1947. The advent came with the first Muslims moving into South Asia in the 7th and 8th centuries, be they newly-converted Arab Muslim traders setting foot on the Kerala coast of south-west Asia or, a few decades later, Muhammad Bin Qasim's invasion of Sindh. As early as the 11th century, the sharp contrasts between Muslims and Hindus in the region were noted by the formidable Persian scholar-traveller, Abu Rayhan Al Biruni, who visited South Asia in 1017 and then wrote a classical treatise. Numerosity grew through migration from Central and West Asia, permanent settlements, peaceful conversions of indigenous people by Sufi saints, transient conquests, long-term control, and minority Muslim rule over a Hindu majority. With the end of the Mughal dynasty in 1857, there began a new critical phase of about 90 years.

The masterful historian, the late K.K. Aziz — who is far less acknowledged in popular discourse than his exhaustive research and outspoken analysis deserve — maps the evolution of the second phase of the Reality and Theory with 170 stages between 1857 and 1940 in his great study: A History of The Idea of Pakistan. The first stage is on June 24, 1858, when John Bright, a Member of the House of Commons in London, proposed that “five or six large presidencies with complete autonomy, ultimately becoming independent states” should form the British response to 1857.

How prescient. Yet, as pointed out in a previous essay by this writer [‘Saving the Quaid; Dawn; Dec 25, 2020], the British government strongly opposed the creation of an independent Pakistan throughout the first six years of the 1940s.

K.K. Aziz continues to trace the path to Pakistan by naming several individuals, organisations and events that advanced the passage. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan helped empower Muslims through education. Ironically, vital contributions obliging Muslims to think of themselves as a separate nation were made by the emergence of exclusivist Hindu forums in the second half of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. These included the Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and others.

Iqbal, Rehmat Ali, Jinnah

In his presidential address at the Muslim League’s annual session in Allahabad in December 1930, Allama Iqbal stated: “I would like to see the Punjab, North West Frontier Province, Sindh and Balochistan amalgamated into a single state. (Writer’s note: by ‘state’ he meant ‘province’). Self-government within the British empire or without the British empire the formation of a consolidated North West Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims at least of North West of India.”

Therefore, credit is rightly attributed to him for being so specific about the Muslim aspirations for autonomy on a regional basis. But there was a notable lack of clarity and consistency. For instance, about 10 months later in a rejoinder-letter published in The Times, London, on October 12, 1931, to correct a misinterpretation of his Allahabad address, Allama Iqbal wrote: “I do not put forward a demand for a Muslim State, outside the British empire, but only a guess at a possible outcome in the dim future of the mighty forces now shaping the destiny of the ... subcontinent. No Indian Muslim with any pretence to sanity contemplates a Muslim state or series of states in North West India outside the British Commonwealth of nations as a plan of practical practice.” Nevertheless, Allama Iqbal continued to emphasise the need for a special status of the Muslim community.

The name and the rationale

It was Chaudhri Rehmat Ali’s invention of the word ‘Pakistan’ and his absolutist focus on a new sovereign entity by that name which makes him the first

individual to set down in explicit terms the definitive foundation for the Reality and Theory. His rationale for Pakistan reflected persuasive lucidity. Even a brief excerpt from *Now or Never*, the pamphlet he wrote and published in 1933, is pungently correct and eloquent:

“India, constituted as it is at the present time, is not the name of one single country; nor the home of one single nation. It is, in fact, the designation of a state created for the first time in history, by the British. It includes peoples who have never previously formed part of India at any period of its history; but who have, on the other hand, from the dawn of history till the advent of the British possessed and retained distinct nationalities of their own.

“In the five Northern Provinces of India, out of a total population of about forty millions, we, the Muslims, constitute about thirty millions. Our religion, culture, history, tradition, economic system, laws of inheritance, succession and marriage are basically and fundamentally different from those of the people living in the rest of India. The ideals which move our thirty million brethren in-faith living in these Provinces to make the highest sacrifices are fundamentally different from those which inspire the Hindus. These differences are not confined to the broad basic principles — far from it. They extend to the minutest details of our lives. We do not inter-dine; we do not inter-marry. Our national customs and calendars, even our diet and dress, are different”.

Like a superb athlete charged to run — and win — the last lap in a relay race, the supreme credit for transforming the Reality and Theory into the solid form of a new nation-state goes to Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah alone.

The Quaid’s openmindedness

It is relevant to remember that, as demonstrated by the Quaid, the Reality and Theory were accommodative and flexible — up to a point. As late as in the second half of 1946, the Muslim League accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan. This formula called for a single, confederal-type state inclusive of Muslim-majority units with the option to reconsider continued association, or secession after 10 years. Nehru and Patel sabotaged the Plan after having initially agreed. This left the Quaid with no choice but to revert to the demand for an independent, sovereign Pakistan.

Yet the Quaid remained open even to radical new options. In May 1947, when Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy proposed a sovereign, united Bengal, Mr. Jinnah fully endorsed the concept. The Congress rejected the proposal because it did not want the Hindu minority of West Bengal to be ruled by an overall Muslim majority.

The Reality and Theory are sometimes misrepresented by detractors as a vision based on hatred of Hindus. At not a single point in their contributions to the process did Allama Iqbal, Chaudhri Rehmat Ali or Muhammad Ali Jinnah ever express hatred. Nor did they stoke xenophobia against Hindus or Sikhs or the followers of other faiths. They simply stressed the stark difference of identity markers between the two communities — to show that Muslims were far too numerous and separate from Hindus in fundamental ways to allow their future to be determined on the simple ‘majority’ principle of democracy. Because, to accept that principle would mean that Muslims could never hope to shape the policies, conditions and environment in which they live — as Hindus would always be in the majority.

The worsening condition of Muslims in India since 1857 under the British rule and post-Independence in 1947 under the Hindu-dominated Congress rule became increasingly visible. So obvious was the discrimination that the Sarkar Committee appointed during Congress rule in the 1990s concluded that the majority of Indian Muslims were in a more depressed condition than even the ‘untouchable’ Dalits. The slide has become faster after 2014 with the takeover of the Indian state by the fascist, extremist Hindu-majority forces of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP and RSS).

Opposed to partition

So inclusive and pluralist is the Two-Nation Reality and Theory that even in May 1947, just three months before independence, Mr. Jinnah strongly and urgently requested British Prime Minister Clement Atlee to reject the partition of Punjab and Bengal that was being urged by the Congress and Viceroy Mountbatten. The Quaid wanted large numbers of non-Muslims — Hindus and Sikhs — to remain in their ancestral homes and become citizens of the new state of Pakistan without facing sudden displacement and insecurity. His speech of August 11, 1947, unequivocally projected the synergistic dimension of the philosophy of Pakistan.

The Two-Nation Reality is cognisant of hard facts not oblivious to them.

The larger scale of Muslim nationalism respects the loyalty of Muslims resident in the different states of South Asia to their respective countries. This is a harmony between two levels of identity. There is no contradiction in the coexistence of fealty to a particular state of which Muslims are citizens and, on the level of personal religious belief, their adherence to Islam, or their pride in their own local ancestries of tribes, clans, communities, dialects, traditions etc.

From two states to three states

From the Two-Nation-Two-State stage of evolution reached in 1947, the Reality moved to a new Two-Nation-Three-State stage in 1971 because South Asian religion-based Muslim nationalism had always encompassed streams of region-based identity. One such form is Bengali Muslim nationalism as in Bangladesh, Pakistani Muslim nationalism as in Pakistan, Indian Muslim nationalism as in India. The first of these is ethnically and linguistically homogenous. The second and third are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Muslims in Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives are also conscious of their exclusive Muslim identities distinct from their fellow non-Muslim citizens.

On certain occasions, the religious affinity may transcend national borders. There are both positive and negative aspects to this linkage. Pakistani Muslims will travel across the border to pay respects at the shrines of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi and Hazrat Khawaja Moinuddin Chishty in Ajmer. Indian Hindus have travelled to pay homage to the historic temple in Hingol, Balochistan, and in Sadhubela, Sukkur. But when extremists in India attack Muslims in India, or when extremists in Pakistan attack temples in Pakistan, then the solidarity and sympathy crosses territorial frontiers. Governments protest that such expressions of sympathy violate principles of non-interference in internal affairs. The dilemma continues.

Like the South Asian region, there are other regions in which national identities shaped by religious faith — or vice versa — have also featured simultaneous affinities with other levels of identity. For instance, in Europe. At one end of its Western, off-shore extreme, Northern Ireland is the scene where violent conflict raged for decades in the 20th century due to conflicts between Catholic and Protestant sects — with loyalties divided between predominantly Protestant United Kingdom and the predominantly Catholic Republic of Ireland.

At the other extreme in south-eastern Europe, the bloodshed that erupted in the early 1990s with the disintegration of Yugoslavia into Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo prominently reflected the conflict between adherence to faith and citizenship-loyalty to old or new state entities.

Conclusion

As it has done over the past 1,300 years, the Two-Nation Reality will continue to evolve in the eras to come. Humanity's willingness to accept new forms of mass organisation will be a determinative factor. But in its own parameters, the Reality will hopefully move from its first stage of concretisation — the formation of two major Muslim nation-states in South Asia and others in which Muslim nations reside in large or in small numbers — to the next stages of progress. After the acceptance of the first of 3Ds, the 'Distinctiveness' of Muslims, the Reality will address the challenges of the second 'D', which is equitable 'Development', an advancement that will erode disparities of gender, income, race, faith and political power. Perhaps this will take several decades. Perhaps less. The effort is well worth making — to approach the third 'D', a 'Destiny' that fulfils the aspirations of the Muslims of South Asia. The next phase will be subject to multiple factors; some within the control of states, some not so. March 23. March 26. They may be markers of convergence or divergence, but what they represent for sure is remarkable endurance.

The writer is an author of, among other books, 'Pakistan: Unique Origins; Unique Destiny?'

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Who is Nudging Pakistan & India Towards Peace Talks? By Sultan M Hali

THE last few years have been the most volatile in the history of Pakistan-India ties. Perhaps the possession of nuclear weapons constrained the two from engaging in all-out conflict but incessant ceasefire violations across the LoC, false flag operations from India and surgical strikes in their wake brought the two on the verge of a deadly war on numerous occasions.

August 5, 2019 illegal annexation of Indian Occupied Kashmir, apparently closed the doors of negotiations. The last few weeks have brought a sea change to the acerbic environment.

First, the military leadership of Pakistan and India jointly announced the implementation of the 2003 ceasefire agreement, bringing an end to the non-stop bombardment across the LoC.

Last week, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tweet to his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan, wishing him recovery from the Coronavirus is being seen in the context of these efforts.

The signs of improvement in recent days following the ongoing tension between Pakistan and India, did not stop here.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written a letter to his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan extending greetings to people of the country on the occasion of Pakistan Day, expressing India's desire of seeking cordial ties with Pakistan.

On Pakistan Day itself, the Indus Water Commissioners of the two countries met face-to-face in New Delhi after a two-year delay, signalling the beginning of the resumption of bilateral relations between the two countries.

The question arises, who is nudging the two erstwhile hostile neighbours towards mending their fences and engaging with each other.

Analysts say the improvement in relations between traditional rivals is due to the behind-the-scenes role of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Independent observers opine that the role of a third party in improving relations and resolving issues between the two countries is positive, because in the past the efforts of the two countries to get closer to each other have failed.

A number of caveats impede the building of optimism towards achieving lasting peace since the process has stalled several times in the past.

The core issue remains the festering two countries appear to be moving towards a solution to the Kashmir dispute.

Indian imbroglio of Kashmir and the talks will be considered fruitful only when the principled position on Jammu and Kashmir while simultaneously consolidating its steps in the wake of its August 5, 2019 action have been to weaken Pakistan's Kashmir.

Therefore, the leadership of Pakistan has to be cautious and position in Kashmir by changing the demographic status of Illegally Indian Occupied Kashmir see how serious India is in resolving the Kashmir issue.

Some Indian analysts, like the Council for Indian Foreign Policy Chairman Dr VP Vaidik, are still drowned in the mire of their oft-parroted narrative.

According to Dr Vaidik, the Kashmir solution cannot be found in accordance with the UN resolution because it is too old to be implemented.

Therefore, Imran Khan and Narendra Modi should take forward the four-point solution agreed upon by Pervez Musharraf and Manmohan Singh.

He opines that in order to resolve the Kashmir dispute, the two countries would have to take a middle path, which he said was paving the way. Dr. Vaidik suggested that if Pakistan and India take a middle path on the Kashmir issue and open the Central Asian route, it would be a decision for the development of South Asia.

He said the U.S. was compelled to seek better relations between India and Pakistan because it wanted the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, for which it was also in talks with Iran and Russia.

However, he said that big countries have their own interests so Pakistan and India should not rely on the U.S. or any other power to improve their personal relations.

In the context of restoring relations, the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and India will attend an international conference in Tajikistan later this month.

It is being speculated that Indian Foreign Minister S Shankar may meet his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi on the occasion.

It is possible that the U.S. may have asked Saudi Arabia and the UAE to move India and Pakistan towards the negotiations table, since the earlier offer of the then President Donald Trump to mediate between Pakistan and India had been declined by Narendra Modi.

It is no coincidence that only 24 hours after India and Pakistan unexpectedly announced the joint commitment to respect the 2003 cease-fire agreement, the top diplomat of the United Arab Emirates flew into New Delhi for a quick one-day visit.

Reportedly, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed and his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar discussed behind closed doors the India-Pakistan cease-fire which was an important development in the secret talks brokered by the UAE that began months earlier.

Without being sanguine, one can assume that the cease-fire is only the beginning of a larger roadmap to forge a lasting peace between the nuclear weapons equipped neighbours, that jostle with each other over the flashpoint of Kashmir.

The next step in the process involves both sides reinstating envoys in New Delhi and Islamabad, who were pulled in after August 5, 2019; the pertinent question would remain, from which point would the talks resume? Would it be after India

agrees to rescind its abrogation of articles 373 and 35A of its Constitution which gave special status to Kashmir or beyond that?

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

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/who-is-nudging-pakistan-india-towards-peace-talks-by-sultan-m-hali/>

Will a Rapprochement Resolve Kashmir? By Shahzad Chaudhry

Cameron Munter, the United States' former ambassador to Pakistan and now a keen Pakistan follower, made an uncharacteristic remark at the recently concluded Islamabad Security Dialogue (ISD). He opined: "India supersedes any other nation as a prime US interest in South Asia; that Pakistan did not exist on the American radar for now unless something else of urgency came up; and that the US will not engage itself in resolving Kashmir between India and Pakistan." It was as directly stated as that; perhaps more so than this paraphrasing suggests. Quite unusual for a diplomat. The moderator, an above par and consummate former diplomat himself, had simply asked, "What would the Biden administration's policy be towards South Asia (always India and Pakistan)?"

Munter having served here long enough knew exactly what the question implied. When Pakistanis inquire on US policy on India and Pakistan it is usually in zero-sum terms. He could have been his usual savvy self and a little diplomatic but he let this one fly. Perhaps it is time to fall back to the old times and learn better how the US dealt with this binary in the past by varying shades only in association and affiliation than throwing its lot wholly in one or the other lap.

That's the price of rhetoric and its uninhibited peddling of the last seven decades. More so in the last few despite better scholarship through exposure to international settings on the back of easier travel and pervasive communications. Those that could have qualified better the formulation of the issue over time under a changing global dynamic failed to stand up to the emotion that drove both policy and rhetoric. Some were swept with the flow for jobbery while others feared being characterised heretical to frame issues like Kashmir in other than popular terms. As a consequence South Asia finds itself stuck in a groove with absolutely no movement forward towards resolution of even what were termed low-hanging fruits. It is possible that we may have missed the bus on most of those already having stood-off under an assumption that engagement meant weakness.

Pakistan has successfully taken on the Indian might in nearly four wars and stood its place. It can do so for another 75 years and fight four more wars, if

needed. Yet the revocation of Article 370 and modifications in Article 35(A) may never be rescinded with attendant policy consequences and massive demographic changes in the period which becomes available to India unchecked. A possible engagement may just bring forth the possibility to modify India's state behaviour towards Kashmir and its excesses. Pakistan is committed to help Kashmir find its freedom and alleviate their perpetual suffering. If it can be negotiated without resorting to war so much the better.

Pakistan also has the unqualified support of the UNSC resolutions suggesting the need and mechanisms to solve the Kashmir dispute. Those have some qualifying parameters before a plebiscite can be held and which will of themselves necessitate a review of the enabling parameters to reach a just solution. But a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since and we haven't gone beyond rhetoric in keeping our people informed of the newer contours of the dispute. It thus always leaves a yawning gap between realpolitik that bases on flexibility and nimbleness and the aspirations and dreams that have been fed through unqualified rhetoric over decades. Sticking to the rhetoric only offers antiquated approach to legacy issues which in a changed world is a non-starter. It shall need far greater enterprise than what is on offer.

There are two grounded realities of the Kashmir dispute. One, the recognition of the fact that a dispute exists per UNSC resolutions which outline certain preparatory and implementable mechanisms of dispute resolution charting the way out of this morass — both countries are in violation of the enabling conditions meant to take us to a resolution. Two, that India and Pakistan are recognised as the two sides to the conflict. Both India and Pakistan are signatories to those resolutions and have accepted their validity and applicability.

Over the years though two other elements have crept in. One is how the Kashmiri people and their fundamental rights of life, property and statehood have been violated by India and how their struggle has found intensity and relevance over the last quarter of a century against such oppression. Thousands have gone down fighting against Indian occupation even as they face brutality and denial of their fundamental right to life and freedom. Unfortunately, they have also not found recourse to an arbiter who could intervene in their support. Only lately some voices have begun to be heard but none is taking the bull by the horn. This has given enough eminence to make the Kashmiris near-formal and rightful claimants to Kashmiri statehood with autonomy over territories so defined as

Jammu and Kashmir. Hence there are now three parties to the conflict. It varies from the definition as claimed in the UNSC resolutions which drove most of the rhetoric. We got to factor this in and understand that variations in the nature of dispute have crept in. This may also change the result to other than the expected when negotiations take place. Should it then force India and Pakistan to look differently at the dispute making possible more innovative options?

Next India has attempted a unilateral alteration of the status of Kashmir within its constitution by revoking some of the articles which retained the uniqueness of Kashmir even when forcibly held. Such assimilation in effect attempts to dilute its status down to a regular Indian state attempting at a stealthy merger of a people and of a territory declared disputed by collective global wisdom. This is a tricky zone to navigate. Pakistan has never accepted any formulation within the Indian constitution on Kashmir so even though there was a terse reaction to Indian legal and legislative excess she claimed to be continually guided by the UNSC resolutions. Yet this factor now rides the process of dealing with the issue. The Kashmiris have reacted violently to being forcibly subsumed and have stood up to contrived legal annexation. For them and for Pakistan the issue may not have changed yet India has gone ahead and forced a legal fait accompli. The world, Pakistan and the Kashmiris will need to deal with this.

A people cannot be denied their freedom and if a nation yearns for it, she will realise its aspiration. How long it might take is the concern. Till then though Pakistan has a decision to make: move ahead with India on other issues such as trade, connectivity and normalisation on most spheres even as Kashmir awaits resolution, or to hold back all else till Kashmir stands resolved. The contours of how matters have moved between India and Pakistan in the last few weeks indicate a strategic shift if not a full-blown choice. A structured engagement with India may just move South Asia finally to peaceful coexistence. It might help unshackle the gridlock moving the region to its full potential. This calls for statesmanship on both sides.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 26th, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2291451/will-a-rapprochement-resolve-kashmir>

SCO Military Drills | Editorial

Pakistan's hosting of anti-terror military drills of the eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) later this year is a big achievement. That Islamabad has been honoured to host the anti-terror exercises is a sign of the faith of regional actors in Pakistan's capabilities to defeat anti-state actors.

Some of the most powerful nations including China and Russia will join Pakistan's law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in these exercises. Hopefully, the forces will learn a great deal from each other in this exchange of fighting tactics.

SCO, established in 2001, primarily focused on fighting against three evil forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism through cooperation. And Pakistani forces have shown to the world that they have defeated the three evil forces in a far better way than any other state could have.

However, despite the recent reports of the thaw between Islamabad and New Delhi, it is not clear if the latter would receive an invitation. This is down to caution due to New Delhi's refusal to join military drills held in Russia last year due to its strained ties with China. Moreover, Pakistan's reluctance to allow Indian forces to participate in these exercises is also understandable considering the rivalry and consistent antagonism from New Delhi.

What goes without saying is that these exercises will offer an opportunity for all participating countries to work closely for regional peace and stability. Furthermore, the drills will open up other avenues of cooperation as well. The world is changing rapidly. The Eurasian region is becoming the hub of global economic activity once again. The more Pakistan invests in the SCO by cooperating with its members, the more dividends it will bring us, as the regional body is a convenient channel for its outreach—trade and strategic ties—to the Central Asian Republics (CARs).

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/27-Mar-2021/sco-military-drills>

Dangerous Third Wave | Editorial

The government has finally decided to ban public gatherings only after the COVID-19 situation in the country has gotten out of control. It took more than 4700 new infection cases and 57 deaths reported in a day to knock some sense in the authorities to tighten restrictions and counter the third wave.

While it is good that the government is showing some action, what is beyond comprehension is that the ban on wedding ceremonies will commence from April 5. What is holding the authorities back from not implementing an immediate ban on such gatherings? Even by a conservative estimate, it is clear that every day wasted means at least another 3000 positive cases.

The delay can cost us dearly. In many cities, all the ventilators allocated for COVID patients have already been occupied. Waiting till April 5 can prove catastrophic for hospitals. The new COVID strain, the leading contributor to the pandemic's third wave, is much more virulent. It is pushing more patients into critical care, as the data available with the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) suggests. It is far more dangerous than the earlier strains as it also affects children.

Also, the gravity of the pandemic's intensification can be gauged from the government's deliberations over restricting intercity travel, which has already started to implement in the capital. The daily reporting of more than 4000 cases means that we have to take precautions with utmost seriousness. Similarly, given the prevalent situation, the government has no option but to take the strongest action now.

Admittedly, the country cannot afford a complete lockdown. However, the authorities can ensure restriction of movement and impose a blanket ban on all kinds of congregations till we flatten the curve. We have succeeded in levelling it before; we can do it now provided the government does not kneel before those who see even smart lockdowns as harmful for their businesses.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/30-Mar-2021/dangerous-third-wave>

ECONOMY

FATF: Looking into the Crystal Ball By **Hasaan Khawar**

On February 22, as Pakistani officials joined the FATF's virtual plenary session, they probably knew in their hearts that Pakistan was still away from an exit from the grey list, yet they took comfort in knowing that Pakistan has successfully dodged the threat of blacklisting, which could have been catastrophic for the country. Only a few months ago, the concluding statement of the FATF's October plenary session had already indicated a change of heart in the global watchdog, as it confirmed that Pakistan had successfully completed 21 out of 27 actions. It was the first time since Pakistan's blacklisting in 2018 that the official FATF statement did not carry an ultimatum. The run-up to the February 2021 meeting therefore had not been as tense as before. If anything, the country has gone ahead and not backwards. And they were proved right, as FATF acknowledged the completion of another three actions.

It is a fact that Pakistan has shown remarkable progress on the FATF action plan in the last 18 months and is now very close to the finish line.

But there are three remaining actions that need to be addressed and if looked at closely, these very actions form the crux of the terrorism financing (TF) challenge. These include demonstrating that TF investigations and prosecutions are targeting designated persons and entities and those acting on their behalf, leading in turn to effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions. The country also needs to demonstrate effective implementation of sanctions against assets of designated persons and entities in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 1267 and 1373.

Even on these three unaddressed areas, Pakistan has made some headway. Law enforcement agencies have intensified their operations against banned outfits such as Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation and the prominent JuD leader Hafiz Saeed, who was already serving

two sentences of five years each, was convicted in two other TF cases, after the last FATF meeting, carrying a five- and 10-year sentence. But apparently this was not deemed enough by FATF and Pakistan has been asked to “do more”.

If Pakistan does not take the foot off the pedal, it is likely to get approval for an on-site visit in June, which could pave the way for the country’s removal from the grey list in October.

But getting out of the grey list doesn’t end this journey for Pakistan. The regular evaluation process for Pakistan’s AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism) regime is on the horizon already.

FATF recently updated its consolidated assessment ratings for different countries, assessing them against 11 immediate outcomes for effectiveness and 40 recommendations for technical compliance. Pakistan’s rating is based on the Mutual Evaluation Report from October 2019 and the Follow-up Report from September 2020. Till date, Pakistan has low effectiveness on 10 out of 11 immediate outcomes, whereas against the 40 recommendations, Pakistan is non-compliant on four, partially compliant on 25, largely compliant on nine and fully compliant on two. Although some of these deficiencies would have already been addressed through the FATF action plan such as through improved regulation of Designated Non-Financial Business and Professions (DNFBP) and trusts or legislation for mutual legal assistance, there are many areas that the country would still need to improve on.

Pakistan will now have to deal with both the FATF action plan as well as the other evaluation process. Although theoretically FATF could merge the two processes, it would be in Pakistan’s interest to keep them separate and claim victory on the grey-list exit first and then deal with the other process. Nevertheless, the whole process can very well spill into the next year. A successful conclusion of both these processes would require continued momentum on ground and persistent behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts to muster up support.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 2nd, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2286950/fatf-looking-into-the-crystal-ball>

CPEC: The Second Phase By Asad Ullah Khan

Over the past few years, the people of Pakistan are very enthusiastic to materialize the \$60 billion investment that is believed to be a game-changer for both Pakistan and the region.

It is worth mentioning here that already \$25bn investment has been completed in the early harvest projects last year (2020) and now the two countries have started the second phase of the CPEC.

It must be understood that the second phase will be more crucial as it is not only dependent upon the rapid industrialization of Pakistan but also how and what will Pakistan offer to the region once the idea is materialized.

During the second phase, Pakistan will have to focus on its internal dynamics in order to achieve the maximum benefit.

The development in the second phase of CPEC will be based upon rapid industrialization. In this context, the smart development of special economic zones without any political prioritization will play a key role in the success of this particular phase.

The basic infrastructure for the process of industrialization will be provided by these special economic zones.

SEZs in any state across the globe are used to attract foreign direct investment, employment opportunities, setting up the pace for transformation of the economy, and implementation of strategic reforms.

Unlike all the progressing nations, Pakistan is trying to achieve these calculated objectives via SEZs under CPEC.

Currently, according to the official CPEC website, there are a total of nine proposed SEZs across Pakistan out of which three are being developed rapidly.

Allama Iqbal Industrial City Faisalabad, Dhabeji SEZ, and Rashakai SEZs are currently under development.

Efficient planning can guarantee half success. However, effective implementation can guarantee full success, therefore, to achieve full success Pakistan will have to devise such an implementation strategy that will address the issues of internal implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

In the second phase of CPEC, due to industrialization, thousands of job opportunities will be created.

According to the statistics, the first phase of CPEC has created 75,000 jobs for local people and only 17.5% of Chinese labor was used.

However, in the second phase, during the process of Industrialization only skilled labor will be able to meet the demands of the public-private partnership.

For this purpose, the government has already launched an initiative to reform the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) but this step alone will not be able to reap the real benefits coming from the second phase of CPEC.

A comprehensive plan to technically train the people in the public and private domain must be drafted and implemented without any further delay.

The plan may revolve around the promotion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Also being a Muslim country, Pakistan can tap the halal food market.

According to estimates, the halal food market will grow to three trillion by 2027, but unfortunately, Pakistan's contribution in this sector is very low.

With a good market strategy, Pakistan can easily capture up to \$5 billion in this particular sector.

It is pertinent to note here that the success of the second phase of the CPEC is also directly linked with how this phase is designed to offer benefits in the region and even beyond the region.

For instance, linking CPEC with Afghanistan may change the strategic matrix in the region. Without peace and stability in Afghanistan, South Asia can never prosper economically.

In this context, when the US is thinking to pull out its forces from Afghanistan, Afghans need to tap economic options in the region because they will observe the cut of \$8 billion aid from the West very soon.

It must be noted that just before the start of the second phase of CPEC Pakistan has announced the increase in the re-opening up on the trade points on the Pak-Afghan border.

Currently, there are 18 trade points between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the most important one is the Torkham border.

After 2014 most of the crossing points were closed, however, Pakistan's special envoy to Afghanistan, Ambassador Muhammad Sadiq, categorically stated that more trading points will be opened soon.

With such steps, the government is trying to expand the second phase of CPEC to its neighborly countries.

To boost the trade from Gwadar port, the Gwadar-Chaman highway will prove to be a catalyst in enhancing trade activities in the region.

Another reason for extending CPEC in the region, especially in the second phase, is Pakistan's aim to reach out to the market of Central Asian States.

Also, the issue of access to the warm waters by the Central Asian states can also be resolved. As mentioned earlier, this can only be made possible once there is peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's deep interest in the Afghan peace process and its effort in making it a success story are not only beneficial for Pakistan but also for regional states that will enjoy prosperity in the form of improved economic connectivity in the region.

The industrialization phase of CPEC will face many challenges coming ahead. The foremost challenge will be the implementation phase.

Unlike the first phase, Pakistan will have to overcome its internal issues to successfully implement the second phase uniformly.

Similarly, extending the CPEC in the region will also be dependent on the Afghan conflict equation. Peace in Afghanistan will facilitate the economic integration of the region.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/cpec-the-second-phase-by-asad-ullah-khan/>

Upcoming ECO Summit | Editorial

The 14th summit of the 10-member Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) was held virtually on Thursday, with Prime Minister Imran Khan opening the summit. Since Pakistan was the chair of the 13th summit, which was held in Islamabad in 2017, this time around, it is Pakistan's leaders who get to give the keynote speech, as Turkey takes over as the chair of this summit.

There is a lot to discuss in these rounds of meetings. It is no surprise that the theme of this year's summit is 'Regional Economic Cooperation in the Aftermath of Covid-19'—the pandemic has raised a number of economic, regional and global issues, which the regional powers, with many mutual areas of interest, could stand to benefit from cooperation.

There are lessons on the pandemic that Pakistan could share with the nine other members of the ECO as well, as our country has managed the influx of the coronavirus in a more balanced way than others. Through the keynote speech, the Prime Minister could share his customary insight on the pandemic, and how to balance opening up the economy while keeping reasonable levels of lockdown.

The summit holds potential for Pakistan. The world is a much different place than it was in 2017—the politics of the regional bloc have completely shifted and Pakistan has much stronger ties with Turkey and Central Asian allies than before. The pandemic too has highlighted the importance of creating more regional economic ties, as traditional strong first-world economies also suffer because of the pandemic.

As a founder of the ECO, along with Turkey and Iran, Pakistan has considerable standing to push for more economic cooperation and regional diplomatic ties. Recent CPEC projects, which have pushed us closer to Central Asian members, strengthen our case. We should utilise this opportunity.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/05-Mar-2021/upcoming-eco-summit>

Rupee Recovers | Editorial

The rupee recovering against the dollar after what can safely be called a prolonged decline ought to give some confidence to economic and debt managers because it implies building confidence in the economy while the favourable exchange rate 'eats up', so to speak, a portion of the outstanding debt. But it also raises a red flag because if this trend goes on too long, however healthy some people might consider it, it will definitely drive down export earnings by making our products more expensive in the international market. That is why it will worry producers, especially those that rely on foreign exchange movements to make their money in a very competitive environment indeed, especially in the post-Covid scenario.

Yet now that there is confidence in the growth potential of the economy it can and should be hoped that tax revenue will surprise to the upside sometime soon enough. It's a good thing that remittances continue to be robust and policy makers are still pretty surprised about the real causes for the sudden bulge. But they won't mind the foreign exchange flowing in whatever the real reasons; be they the necessity of using formal money transfer channels only because of Covid-related restrictions or the fact that a lot of people have lost their jobs and are sending back their life-savings. Still, it is very important to remember that sooner or later this phase, of unusually high remittances, will pass and all the government will be left with are going to be tax receipts and export revenue.

That is why the rupee's rise should be watched very closely. If indeed GDP gains strength and the economy starts moving in the right direction, then there is also the prospect of high inflation and the central bank raising interest rates and discouraging private sector offtake. It's also of a little concern that exports didn't really respond to the collapsing rupee in the manner that was hoped, even though Pakistan recovered faster than most other countries from the lockdown and was therefore able to capture trade markets lost to other manufacturers still in quarantine. Still, all eyes will now be on the growth trajectory and how a resurgent economy breathes life into GDP growth and dilutes the debt to whatever extent it can.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/733748/rupee-recovers/>

Monetary Policy | Editorial

THE State Bank's decision to keep an easy monetary policy in place is a clear sign that it doesn't want to upset the ongoing economic recovery. The decision signals the bank's willingness to hold steady interest rates in the near term to support recovery until it becomes "more durable" and the economy returns to full capacity. Yet the bank has kept its doors open for "measured and gradual adjustments" to achieve mildly positive real interest rates going forward.

The State Bank's dovish monetary stance is in line with broader market expectations, and the global trend of central banks supporting recovery from the effects of the coronavirus. It is, therefore, safe to assume that the low-interest-rate environment will continue for a while despite revival of the IMF programme and higher world oil and food prices fuelled by stronger global growth projections that could feed into domestic inflation.

In a departure from its pre-virus, contractionary monetary policy stance and with the average headline inflation expected to remain close to the upper end of the projected range of 7pc to 9pc this fiscal, the bank is maintaining interest rates in a negative territory at 7pc for the past nine months to help businesses fight the adverse impact of the pandemic, boost industrial output and avoid cancelling investment plans. Another major reason for the bank to maintain this policy is to offset the potential impact of the contractionary fiscal policy on economic growth and investment. "...[G]iven that fiscal policy is expected to remain contractionary to reduce public debt, it is important for monetary policy to be supportive [of growth and investment] as long as the second-round effects of recent increases in the administered prices and other one-off supply shocks do not materialise, and inflation expectations remain well anchored," the bank noted.

Indeed, this response to the pandemic has played a key role in the economic recovery under way since last year. LSM has expanded by 7.9pc in the first seven months of the fiscal compared to a 3.2pc contraction during the same period the previous year. Yet output gap remains negative as LSM recovery is narrowly based. The external sector also appears stable and in spite of the rising trade deficit, the current account deficit is still projected to remain below 1pc of GDP. Encouraged by these developments, the bank has revised upwards its growth projection for the financial year to 3pc against the government's target of

2.1pc on improved prospects for manufacturing output and stimulus to counter the effects of Covid-19.

However, risks remain because of the emergence of a virulent third wave of Covid-19, plus uncertainty regarding inflation and growth outlook. So far, inflationary risks have been outweighed by the uncertainty spawned by the pandemic in monetary policy determination. But for how long? The government's failure to tackle the supply-side factors fuelling inflation could compel the bank to reverse its accommodative stance.

Published in Dawn, March 22nd, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1613928/monetary-policy>

Regional Trade | Editorial

PAKISTAN'S exports to regional countries — including South Asian nations, Iran and China — have plunged by a hefty 22pc during the eight-month period from July to February, according to PBS data on international trade. Even without the full-blown impact of Covid-19, the downturn in the country's exports to the region would not have come as a total surprise. Pakistan's trade with regional economies, with the exception of China, has historically remained far below its potential. The data shows that trade with almost all our neighbours, especially India and Afghanistan, has been on the decline for some years. Decades of efforts to boost trade between Saarc nations notwithstanding, South Asia continues to be among the least economically connected regions in the world. The realisation that regional trade is one of the most crucial tools for economic progress and increased competitiveness of countries in various parts does not seem to matter. The close economic and trade relations between the Southeast Asian countries, for example, has played a major role in their turnaround in recent decades, and helped them cut poverty.

There are multiple factors which have long prevented economic connectivity of the Saarc countries that also include Afghanistan. Long-standing political and territorial disputes between individual states, terrorism and poor security conditions in other countries, non-tariff barriers created by some to protect their local businesses, higher cost of trading within the region etc are only a few of the many issues stalling the development of closer economic ties. There are also certain 'exogenous' issues such as the international sanctions against Iran, which keep Pakistan and others from developing commercial ties with the affected country. All these factors have been there for a very long time with little hope for their resolution anytime soon, forcing Pakistan and others to look to the West and elsewhere for trade prospects. Although Pakistan's economic ties with China have improved since the two countries signed an FTA more than one and a half decades ago, a similar arrangement with Sri Lanka has not helped boost trade with Colombo. Pakistan and the rest of the countries in the region possess huge potential to tap into one another's markets and enhance the value of their trade. But that will not be possible unless they, especially India and Pakistan, take serious steps to start a conversation aimed at settling political and other disputes in the larger interest of their people.

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1614488/regional-trade>

CPEC and Regional Trade By Hassan Mujtaba

In the Chinese Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) holds a central value as it connects the terrestrial Silk Road with the Maritime Silk Road.

In other words, CPEC acts as a bridge between the two most important trading routes of the BRI.

Moreover, the Gwadar Port—also known as the Crown Jewel of CPEC—is instrumental in connecting the landlocked Xinjiang and other western Chinese provinces with regional markets and global trading hubs.

This is because western China is located much closer to Gwadar port than the Eastern Chinese ports, and this proximity has the potential to further develop western China via the spill-over effects of CPEC and regional trade.

While research on CPEC is still scant, this author had the honour to write his Masters of Philosophy (MPhil) dissertation at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) on CPEC.

The exact research question probed the impact of CPEC on bilateral and regional trade using the ‘Gravity Model’ of International Trade.

Put very simply, the gravity model is a mathematical equation that analyzes the trade flows between two countries (for example, country-i & country-j) as directly proportional to the product of their gross domestic product (GDP) but inversely proportional to the distance between them.

Modern economics research based on econometric analyses usually augments the gravity model to include other variables.

For example, this author augmented the gravity model of CPEC to include foreign direct investment (FDI), per capita income, trade restrictions (such as tariff and non-tariff barriers), relative distance and the effects of a common

language, landlocked and free-trade agreements as other explanatory variables for estimation.

Using the Panel Data estimation techniques of fixed effects (FE) and random effects (RE), I found that the CPEC will directly increase the regional trade flows by a whopping 119%.

This means that with a fully operational CPEC, the regional (South Asian) trade will increase from the current \$23 billion to \$49 billion.

In addition, this author created an interesting hypothetical bloc denoted CPEC-1 by including India, Iran, and Afghanistan (i.e., Pakistan's neighbours) as partners in the CPEC project.

The purpose of this inclusion was to test the impact of CPEC-1 on regional trade flows.

The addition of CPEC-1 in the gravity model was inspired by speculation in the media vis-à-vis the inclination of many [regional] countries to join CPEC.

This author expected that a larger bloc of CPEC will create more trade flows in the South Asian region, especially considering the inclusion of India and Iran, which are big economies ranked at 5th and 22nd respectively.

However, the results were nothing but surprising. The econometric estimation of the Gravity Model containing CPEC-1 revealed that such a bloc will decrease the regional trade by 25%! In other words, a CPEC bloc with India, Iran and Afghanistan as additional partners will decrease the South Asian trade flows from the current \$23 billion to \$17.25 billion.

This unexpected result can be interpreted in various ways. First, the militancy fuelled in Pakistan by India via RAW and its proxies such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is directly responsible for creating unrest and political instability in Pakistan hence affecting its economic activities.

These militant organizations are also responsible for the kidnapping and killing of many Chinese engineers and labourers in Baluchistan and other areas of Pakistan.

Research shows that for every 100% increase in terror incidents, the level of bilateral trade falls by 4%.

This is because terrorism increases the cost of business (such as cross-border documentation, insurance fees), transaction costs, freight costs, besides resulting in a general atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

Second, the hostile environment created in the South Asian region by a belligerent right-wing India led by Hindutva has sowed the seeds of division and hatred among the neighbours who once enjoyed friendly and peaceful diplomatic ties.

As a result, diplomacy is replaced by cautious militarism and which is having a direct negative effect on regional trade and economic development.

This explanation is also backed by empirical evidence. For example, a study conducted by American political scientist Brian Pollins states that the level of bilateral and multilateral trade between and among countries is directly affected by the quality of their diplomatic relations.

In other words, good diplomatic relations translate into more bilateral trade and vice versa.

Similarly, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), in their landmark book titled *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* also assert that many economic phenomena have their roots in political developments, and regional trade is no exception.

To conclude, the BRI in general and CPEC, in particular, is a game-changer project for the region.

While many analysts have compared the project to “Marshall Plan”, the reality is that BRI is far more efficacious as it has the potential to bring entire countries and regions out of poverty and towards sustainable [economic] development,

while the Marshall Plan was merely an aid program having no growth or development repercussions for the recipient countries.

In this context, then, Pakistan's neighbouring countries, especially India, are well-advised to shed their truculence and join hands with Pakistan & China in making CPEC a success by promoting peace, fostering diplomatic ties, and cracking down against terrorist outfits.

Such an attitude will yield win-win results for all stakeholders and will make CPEC an engine of growth and international trade in a region which is home to 29% of the world's impoverished population.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/cpec-and-regional-trade-by-hassan-mujtaba/>

EDUCATION

The Education Conundrum | Editorial

Millions of children, without proper internet or technological facilities, and a single channel — this is the current state of education in Pakistan amid Covid-19. But let's be clear: the pandemic has not given rise to this learning crisis, instead it has merely aggravated it. With more than 22 million children currently out of school, the education system of the country has been in an abysmal state long before the pandemic even started, owing to corruption, mismanagement and negligence of authorities.

As the government still continues to struggle at finding a suitable solution to the conundrum, the general opinion about re-opening educational institutions remains polarised. Some believe education cannot wait while others are adamant that health comes before all else. However, after almost a year of fluctuating decisions, the Sindh government has gone against the Centre's recent announcement of resuming all regular classes from March 1 and has instead decided to stick to its 50% attendance policy. With multiple children cramped up in small shabby classrooms and dilapidated school vans, constantly interacting with each other, it will become impossible to ensure social distancing at 100% attendance. In this regard, the 50% policy not only helps restrict the spread but it also gives students the flexibility of choosing either option. With over 200,000 schools in Pakistan, containing over 600,000 teachers and millions of students, the federal authorities need to consider the very real threat of a third wave which can easily ensue if curbs are lifted completely.

While the government remains in a quandary, choosing either of the two extreme options may prove to be detrimental. A complete closure would result in a significant learning loss, while reopening would entail a high risk. The solution to the riddle, which is at the junction of technology and social welfare, will only reveal itself if both institutions are uplifted and strengthened. In the meantime, the middle ground of 50% attendance seems to be an adequate choice.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 2nd, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2286959/the-education-conundrum>

CSS and English By Naif Memon

THE English language is the heart and soul of civil service examinations and one cannot qualify them without being familiar with the language.

It has been observed that every year many students are unable to clear the CSS examinations owing to lack of proficiency in English.

One cannot deny the fact that the nation of Pakistan is still under language imperialism.

We may have got our independence from the British, but we are still enslaved by their language.

A few provisions have been made to facilitate CSS candidates because students who sit the examinations come from different fields, such as engineering, medical, arts, etc.

For instance, general knowledge subjects, like Pakistan Studies, current affairs, general science etc., have been merged to form one group carrying 300 marks of which one has to secure 120.

However, no provisions have been considered for the English language subjects (essay, precis and composition).

If these subjects are also merged to form a group, then one will have to secure 80 marks out of the total 200.

This step may not be enough to overcome the language barrier, but it can give a ray of hope to CSS aspirants who may be competent but not fluent in English language.

Published in Dawn, March 12th, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1612074/css-and-english>

Education Policy 2021: A Few Fundamentals to Ponder Upon By Prof Dr Kanwal Ameen

The Federal Ministry of Education has sought suggestions from various stakeholders for developing the Pakistan Education Policy 2021. This is indeed a commendable and much-needed initiative. With 35 years of experience as an educationist and researcher in various areas of information management, information behaviour, information use, library services, communication skills, social skills and quality of education, I would like to share a few points to ponder upon in this regard.

Firstly, it is most important that before making Pakistan's education policy, we consider the phenomenal changes which have taken place in the learning, knowledge and information-seeking behaviours of Generation Z and the following generations called Alpha, Gen-Tech, Post-Millennials, iGeneration, GenY-Fi and so forth, and the context of the rapidly evolving digital paradigm in Pakistan.

Secondly, our education policy, aims, contents, and curriculum are designed usually by the most senior experts, who are knowledgeable in their fields but often exhibit a generation gap, i.e., are inconsiderate to the changing inner and outer world of the current and future generations. They often tend to forget how as young students they would think and act. As a result, they fail to make a connection with young adults and create a communication/generation gap between the intended objectives of an academic programme and its learning outcomes. I would say it is similar to the gap at our homes between adults and children.

Thirdly, the two common sources of getting education and dissemination of knowledge have been: i) teachers — with a focus mainly on textbooks; and ii) libraries — as sole houses of knowledge with shelves upon shelves of books, and rules aimed to protect books instead of making them conveniently available to users. We call it a collection-centered approach instead of usage-centered. The developed world has moved to usage-centered approach whereas our mindset is still stuck towards collections and saving them. We must consider that these two main sources are no more the only options. The digital revolution with

availability of full text information on smartphone devices with 4G connections has made it much easier to find what one needs at one's own convenience.

In this backdrop, the educational policy, plans and curriculum must be prepared to develop future generations as independent lifelong learners, fluent in information, digital and news literacy skills, information ethics in the virtual environment and to grow as socially sensitive and responsible citizens. The learning materials must sensitise students towards inclusivity: which means respecting different opinions, religions, cultures, castes, sects, languages, genders, etc. Mutual respect, harmony and equity must be introduced from the early years through interactive lesson plans. These learnings must create peace in society while exhibiting the true face of Islam to the world. The Transformative Theory of Learning by Mezirow (2003) based on "a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perspectives" should be considered as a pedagogical base for instructing young adults.

The 21st century students need to develop the following capabilities grouped under three categories of skills. These are intended to help students keep up with the ever-emerging market needs and succeed in their careers during the Information Age. Each skill is essential in the age of the internet to make youngsters lifelong, independent learners with responsible and ethical information behaviours in the virtual and real world. I have added a few more skills under the following categories of the skills found in the literature. 1) Learning Skills: observation; critical thinking; creativity; collaboration; communication, professionalism 2) Literacy Skills: information literacy; media literacy; digital literacy; news literacy, 3) Life Skills: flexibility; positivity; leadership; initiative; productivity; and social skills.

The teaching of compulsory subjects of Islamic Studies and Pakistan Studies needs a fresh approach. The content must be prepared and delivered in a manner to induce their value among learners and create interest for further exploration, as in their present form students consider these subjects cumbersome. Pakistan Studies is focused more on rote learning of history and memorising dates. The fact of the matter is that these are sensitive areas, hence, we stay away from bringing them into open discussion or from writing on the intertwined dichotomies related to nationalism, humanism and Islamism. The outcome is that even our educated elite is either confused or rigid on these

matters, and not open to deliberations on alternative schools of thought in a scholarly manner.

Moreover, the option given to non-Muslim students of studying Ethics instead of Islamic Studies seems absurd. It would be better to rename it as 'Ethics in Islam' for Muslim students. The teachings of Islam should not be merely under the generic banner of Islamic Studies throughout early education to the higher level. Islamic Studies should be grouped as faith, ethics, history, community service, humanism, etc. Furthermore, contemporary challenges are not addressed in the modern context, and only limited topics are included using references from the medieval era. Hence, our youth stays confused about basic aspects related to faith and their application, universal ethics, and understanding the value of mutual respect and harmony with other creeds and sects. Then, there is the Urdu text which makes up half or more of Islamiyat instead of short, interesting and meaningful stories to develop a reading habit amongst the juveniles while learning the language and lessons of life in a subtle manner.

Last but not the least, equally important aspects are the delivery of the content, instruction methods, and teacher's training to get the required results. Otherwise, the changes will remain merely cosmetic.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 16th, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2289577/education-policy-2021-a-few-fundamentals-to-ponder-upon>

Reform the CSS Examination By Anwar Ali

ON 18 February 2021, the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) commenced the examination of Central Superior Services (CSS), 2021.

On the first day, language proficiency in English was tested through two papers, English Essay and English Précis & Composition.

Last year, for CSS-2020, total 39,630 candidates applied for the examination but 18,553 candidates appeared and only 376 candidates could clear the written examination.

The FPSC has not released the figures for 2021, but it is expected that the number would be higher than or equal to that of the previous year.

The sheer number touching 19,000 is a gigantic task to evaluate candidates in subjective written examination. Nevertheless, the major fiasco or failure comes through the papers of English Essay, English Précis & Composition or Islamyat.

In 2018, while assigning the task to Dr Ishrat Hussain, the incumbent government informed the public of its resolve to introduce reforms into the CSS-exam system. After three years, the reforms have not seen the light of the day.

One significant aspect of the reforms was to introduce screening test before the written examination to winnow out the candidates ill-prepared for attempting the written examination.

The reform, if introduced, would lessen the burden of checking thousands of papers each year cumbersome for the FPSC.

Second, the reform would help the examiners mark the answer sheets, which would be fewer in number, more fairly than before. Resultantly, a just evaluation of each candidate appeared for the written examination would take place.

In CSS-2021, the FPSC once again promoted cram learning by offering trite topics in the paper of English essay. Out of ten given topics, the candidates had to attempt only one essay. Of given ten topics, three were substandard viz.,

“Meaning purposive education”, “Gender equality: a popular slogan”, and “Pros and cons of globalization”. These topics were substandard because these have been the oft-repeated topics for the past ten years.

These topics fall under the class of generational essays – the essays which are prepared and used by one generation and then they are handed down to the successive generation.

When a choice to intellectual escape is given, candidates prefer to attempt such commonplace topics. In principle, essay topics are meant for prompting original thoughts in candidates. This was not the case.

In the market, called the CSS-market, these three essays were cardinal part of the guess papers issued by almost all CSS coaching academies.

In the CSS-market, dozens of quotations are available to attempt such essays. This is where the rub lies. When topics are predictable, quotations and parroting come in.

Except where books and their contents are quoted, quotation-inflicted essays do not reflect ingenuity and inventiveness of a candidate, who dissembles to be a genuine sedulous one, thereby denting the right of scoring high of assiduous fellow candidates who count on originality and creativity.

By offering such hackneyed expectable essay topics, the FPSC has facilitated once again disingenuous candidates to pass the examination, outsmart the fellow painstaking genuine candidates, and join the civil services.

It is now known that most candidates have attempted any of these three essays. Expectedly, such candidates would keep relying on conventionality and excerpts anchored in precedents and would keep on avoiding novelty in their thoughts and actions throughout their service careers.

If the masses suffer at the hands of such civil servants, the responsibility lies squarely on the recruiting body, the FPSC. In fact, by promoting such essay papers, the FPSC has done disservice to the country.

Advertently or inadvertently, by giving such essay topics, the FPSC has helped CSS coaching academies survive.

CSS coaching academies, which are now plenty across the country, convince candidates to bank on confirmed predictable essay topics on which these academies arrange mock tests.

Currently, the coaching charges for one five months' course per candidate are around one lakh rupees.

Candidates with modest or lowly background can neither attend these coaching academies nor can they sever the symbiotic relationship extant between CSS coaching academies and the FPSC.

The government needs to intervene to offer equal opportunities to candidates from rural background to express their talent without financial pressure shifting onto their families, and it is doable.

In CSS-2021, the objective section (Q 1) of English Précis & Composition was pictured by some candidates and the section came out of the examination center. This section was supposed to lie hidden.

The FPSC failed to put a check on candidates, who brought their mobile phones or pen cameras to the examination hall.

To find out the meaning of 20 words through given multiple choice options, seven words were odd: SOT, Bricloge [Bricolage], Demiurge, Hagiographic, Tousled, Chiaroscuro, and Caitiff.

Instead, preference should have been given to asking the meaning of the words used in functional English. The oddity was enough to permeate insecurity amongst candidates.

Nevertheless, beauty of this paper was that précis and other questions were perfect for exploring both grammar and comprehension abilities of candidates.

This paper evinces that FPSC has understood clearly and rightly so that without raising standards of English, Pakistan's civil servants cannot compete with their counterparts from other countries.

In today's competitive world, the need is not to lower the quality of knowledge but to raise it.

Certain CSS coaching academies, especially in Lahore and Islamabad, have been inciting CSS candidates into standing up against the FPSC and malign it to make it compromise English standards both in written and viva voce.

A campaign is underway to compel the FPSC to conduct viva voce – the stage that comes after a candidate passes the written examination – in both Urdu and English.

This is a step towards discounting English from viva voce initially and then from the written examination eventually.

The proponents of such a malicious campaign have failed to realize that, in this globalized world, English is now an international language being learnt by even those nations such as Japan, China, Germany and Russia which kept reeling under the unwieldy heft of nationalism to militate against English.

Besides, English is a language of science and, without understanding science, life cannot be valuable.

—The writer is a retired civil servant and now a coach to candidates aspiring to join the civil services.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/reform-the-css-examination-by-anwar-ali/>

Higher Education in Peril | Editorial

Before the Britishers arrived, the sub-continent was a thriving intellectual region. Even though education was perpetuated through religious institutions — the ‘Madrassa’ for the Muslims and the ‘Pathshala’ for the Hindus — contemporary sciences, multilingual manners and spirituality were also a part of their teachings. The morals of the people were exceptionally high. This, according to Lord Macaulay, a British secretary who was sent by the Raj on a special task to study the educational system of this continent, was “their spiritual and social infrastructure, taught and strengthened by their system of education”. In order to break India’s backbone and destroy the self-esteem of the people, the Britishers decided to introduce a new English medium system by establishing missionary schools to enforce Western ideals and induce a sense of inferiority among the people. This is where the fracture started, and it has all been downhill still then.

Even throughout Pakistan’s own history, higher education, freedom of expression and intellectual pursuits have long been repressed by political leaders and military dictators who have time and again put curbs on academic freedom and imposed strict regimentation on universities and student unions. The remnants of the past have been lingering on and even today the Higher Education system across Pakistan continues to be strangulated due to external interference, corruption and intolerance. There is no space for innovation, critical thinking and inventiveness as students as well as teachers are forced to work in a highly suffocating environment – that is if they have the privilege to study or teach in the first place. To make matters worse, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has failed to introduce and implement new policies, due to negligence and financial constraints. Marred by corruption and nepotism, the HEC has also not been able to formulate a proper curriculum and set up an efficient recruitment system.

As a result, Pakistan faces a serious issue of brain drain since academic jobs have become extremely unreliable. In order to retain intellectual capacity, officials must focus on creating a safe environment conducive to learning. A middle ground between the modern and traditional education system of education needs to be sought out.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2290390/higher-education-in-peril>

WORLD

US Syria Strike | Editorial

IF the US is serious about mending fences with Iran, then firing missiles at fighters allied with Tehran in Syria may not be the best way to go about it. In President Joe Biden's first major offensive overseas action, over 20 fighters belonging to militias loyal to Iran were killed when American missiles struck facilities in eastern Syria. While the Pentagon has termed the attack "a message", Damascus has called it "American aggression". The strikes came as an apparent reaction to the targeting of a base in Iraq hosting American forces on Feb 15, reportedly by pro-Iran militias. The fact is that the entire region, particularly Iraq and Syria, is a proxy battlefield where the US and its allies regularly square off against Iran and its loyalists. And while many Shia militias in Iraq take orders from Tehran, there are numerous armed factions that operate independently. Therefore, the need here is to proceed with caution, and prevent any sort of escalation, with both sides required to exhibit restraint.

It is entirely possible that the Biden administration has flexed its muscles through the missile strike, letting Iran know that while it is ready to talk, it still has offensive options on the table. Iran, meanwhile, has called upon Washington to lift sanctions before it returns to its commitments under the nuclear deal, which Mr Biden's predecessor unilaterally pulled the US out of. The Islamic Republic has been scaling back on its commitments ever since the Trump administration started intensifying its 'maximum pressure' campaign on Iran. Therefore, at this point there is both great opportunity and great peril for the region. The opportunity lies in the fact that the new incumbent of the White House is using a less confrontational tone with Iran, and if both sides reach a halfway point progress can be made in returning to the deal and improving relations. However, peril lies in the fact that if the US chooses to talk through its considerable firepower, as it did in eastern Syria, and Iran opts to respond in a similar tone, the confrontation will worsen. The US can send a more positive signal to Iran by letting it know that sanctions relief will be guaranteed if it returns to its

commitments, while the Iranian leadership should also lower the temperature and talk to the Americans, for the sake of its struggling economy.

Published in Dawn, March 1st, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1610092/us-syria-strike>

The Elusive Afghan Peace Process By Najm us Saqib

Last year's agreement reached between President Trump and the Taliban to withdraw all foreign troops, including US service members, from Afghanistan by May 1 seems to have met the similar fate of all such deals made in the past. In view of the recommendations made by the US congressionally appointed panel to delay the deadline, Washington is likely release information regarding whether it would honour its former President's commitment in this regard or not. The golden opportunity provided to the US in Doha to undertake a peaceful exit-strategy from the Afghan conflict seems to have been lost in the air, perhaps forever. Meanwhile, announcing that NATO's troops would remain in Afghanistan until the time was right for withdrawal, Secretary General Stoltenberg, on February 18, lamented the fact that talks were 'fragile', the progress was 'slow', and the Afghan Forces were seemingly not capable of maintaining peace and security in the country. Are we back to square one?

The question is not how many foreign troops will leave Afghanistan and when? Neither is it the right sizing of troops or the speed of withdrawal and advantages or disadvantages of going too fast or too slow in the withdrawal process. Nor is it the debate on finding non-political solutions to the Afghan conflict. The question is whether Afghanistan will become a terror-free and peaceful country once a broad based peace plan, after reaching agreement, is successfully carried out? Would the intra-Afghan settlement of mutual grievances or striking a doable peace accord or placing a broad based stable government in Kabul allay fears of the stakeholders and provide some breathing space to the people of Afghanistan? Hopefully, yes.

The irony is that the real aim of having a stable Afghanistan has unknowingly dissolved in the unending discussion on the proportionate increase or gradual decrease or complete withdrawal of foreign troops from this eternally war ravaged country. The crucial question as to who should run the country once America's longest war in history comes to an end, still remains unanswered mainly because the warring parties desire total administrative control over the country with no interference from any sides. Rightly so then, the change of deadlines or announcing a fresh withdrawal schedule does not concern the

Taliban at all. Believing that time is on their side and the withdrawal of foreign troops is on the cards in any case, they might not be seriously inclined to cut fresh deals any more.

As if President Ashraf Ghani's refusal to release thousands of incarcerated Taliban or the establishment of an interim government were not enough indications of the failure of the Afghan peace process that the Doha agreement has been unilaterally modified. On the other hand, imminent threats to Kandahar—seizing of highways leading to Kabul by the Taliban, the alarming situation in and around Kunduz and Pul Khumri in the North, renewed attacks on both sides, increased 'undesirable' activities of the Taliban, persisting violence and the ostensible inability of the Afghan forces to seize control—are strong enough indicators for NATO to change its pullout plans. With reports of continued fights amongst the Taliban, ISIS, various warlords, foreign troops and the Afghan government, any solution to the Afghan conflict or bringing peace and security in the region is, at best, an indefinable hope. Instead of withdrawal, one might see a substantial increase in the number of foreign troops in Afghanistan soon.

Be aware and determined against wicked intentions of enemy: COAS Bajwa
Presumably, during the last 19 years of conflict, the US must have reached the same conclusion about messing with Afghanistan as the British and Russians did in the past. Washington must have a fair idea by now that the 'Graveyard of Empires', Afghanistan, has always been difficult to conquer or rule mainly because of its mysteriously unique terrain and extreme divergence in local political and cultural milieu. Trying to surmount the fearless people of Afghanistan or their extremely inimitable dwellings is nothing but a false hope. The US must have a fair idea by now that the hearts and minds of the Afghans could only be won by their own elders, if at all such a concept exists in the Afghan culture. In addition, it must be clear to Washington that the ongoing Afghan peace process is devoid of the most crucial element in any successful negotiations, sincerity of purpose. The West needs to realise one more thing about Afghanistan. Even if there was only one Afghani left on his soil, he would prefer to take a bullet in his chest instead of laying down arms. Hence, taking a lesson from history, even a hundred-year war is not likely to produce the 'desired results'. The ongoing Afghan war is perhaps the most expensive and time consuming wild goose chase this world has ever seen.

The human, economic, political and monetary losses so far borne in the 19-year old Afghan conflict by all concerned parties, including the people of Afghanistan, are incalculable. These losses are likely to increase in the coming days, months and years if promises were not kept or a better sense does not prevail or a spade is not called a spade. The Afghan conflict and efforts for bringing peace in Afghanistan have already cost the world more than the colossal amount of funds spent on the rebuilding of Europe after WW2.

Pieces on the chessboard are being rearranged to chalk out the future of Afghanistan, a country that has seemingly lost everything except its pride, history and strategic value. One only hopes that the 'real objectives' behind the conflict also included the after-war reconstruction of Afghanistan and this unfortunate country was not left at the mercy of fate once again. One also hopes the history of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is not repeated either. If the statements of former First Lady, Hillary Clinton, are to be believed, just as it did in the past, would the US leave the Colosseum for the Gladiators to sort everything out on their own? Only time will tell.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/01-Mar-2021/the-elusive-afghan-peace-process>

US-Iran Stand-off By Dr Huma Baqai

MIDDLE East is heating up and making headlines once again. There is an escalation of tension between Tehran and Washington following a US air-strike on Syria, allegedly housing pro-Iranian militia

. Apparently, Iran retaliated by attacking a sprawling air base in Iraq that serves as one of the most consequential hubs of the US-led military presence.

It came under attack by ten rockets. Officials in Washington did not identify the group responsible for the attack.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, an Iran-backed militia's news outlet says three US soldiers were killed in the attack.

The Iraqi officials issued a very carefully crafted statement, saying Iran was behind the attack, but, more importantly, gave a very important message, almost a warning, to Iran and its Iraqi proxies.

It warns Iran and its proxies not to use Iraqi land in their escalation with the United States, says Randa Slim, a Regional Expert and Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute.

Iraq wants to distance itself from the ongoing regional and international competition for power.

The rocket attack risks further spikes and violence at a time when the Biden Administration is trying to coerce Iran to return to the negotiating table. Iran has responded with caution to Biden's offer of negotiations.

However, the strike carried out by the US against pro-Iranian forces in Syria has complicated the security matrix further.

The strike had bipartisan support in the US and was aimed at giving the US a position of power prior to the negotiations.

The retaliation from Iran has forced White House to warn Iran of a military response.

It has stroked fears of another cyclic 'tit for tat' attacks that happened in 2020.

Those attacks included the one that killed Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad and set off months of increased troop levels in the region.

The deterioration in US-Iran relations takes place against the backdrop of a battle for regional influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia, including proxy wars in Yemen and Syria, as well as strategic competition in Lebanon and more recently Iraq.

Iran's cold and measured response to the Biden Administration's push for diplomatic engagement along with the rising tension in the region makes salvaging the 2015 nuclear deal extremely difficult.

Both the US and Iran are caught in a diplomatic dance that seems to be moving in circles.

Iran insists on immediate withdrawal of sanctions whereas the US wants to work around compliance, inspections, and conditionalities.

Iran is still open to negotiation; however, the window of opportunity is shrinking. Iranian President Hasan Rouhani before the recent escalation said on record that, "The new US Administration should immediately stop economic terrorism operations against Iran.

Such a move will open the way. That is the key to opening the door and holding talks together."

Post the attack, Saeed Khatibzadeh, the spokesperson for Ministry of Foreign Affairs Iran, tweeted on 01 March 2021, that "considering US/E3 positions and actions, time isn't ripe for the proposed informal meeting. Remember: Trump failed to meet because of his ill-advised 'Max Failure'.

With sanctions in place, same still applies. Censuring is NOT diplomacy. It doesn't work with Iran."

Embedded in the situation, is the lingering question, whether a US-Iran reconciliation 2.0 is an option? This needs to be urgently answered as there may only be little time left to save the deal.

Rafael Grossi, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which monitors Iran's nuclear activity flew to Tehran for inspection of Iranian nuclear program, expected to take three months to complete.

But the inspection data, including surveillance images, will be held by Iran in the meantime.

Moreover, the 2015 deal has its flaws and fails to address Iran's missile program and regional activity. If an agreement is reached, Iran may hand over the data.

If there is no agreement, Iran has said it will destroy the data—and along with it, perhaps the last good chance to save the nuclear deal and find a diplomatic solution.

The growing tension may result in Iran doing the extreme.

The biggest misstep by the Biden Administration is perhaps that by taking a hard line, it has reawakened old fears in Tehran dating back decades that Washington will always renege on a deal and end up demonizing Iran.

This goes back at least to 9/11, when Iranian moderates such as Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (later a key architect of the 2015 deal) sought rapprochement with Washington.

Tehran even helped Washington form the post-Taliban government in neighbouring Afghanistan—only to find itself attacked weeks later in former President George Bush's infamous "Axis of Evil" speech.

More importantly, the Iranian political system has multiple centers of power and the President and his Cabinet are, by no means, in control of all aspects of policy.

At the top of the political system sits the Supreme Leader, who remains the ultimate arbitrator of Iran's dealings with the US.

The powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp is a state within a state and has a central role in Iran's foreign policy, particularly its support for militant groups in countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

Complicating it further, is Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's indirect criticism of Biden Administration for its intention to return to the Iran nuclear deal, where he said, he was prepared to "stand against the entire world" to stop it.

This is a major change of tune for Netanyahu, who had been careful in his statements on the Iran deal and avoided publicly criticizing Biden. This came before the Israeli election on 23 March 2021.

The elections in Iran is due in June 2021. This indeed shrinks the manoeuvring ground for the Biden Administration.

Ellie Geranmayeh, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the European Council on Foreign Relations, is of the view that if the United States wants to get Iran back to the negotiating table, it is likely to take precisely the sort of gesture that the Administration has been so far unwilling to make.

That could mean issuing waivers to allow foreign companies to work with Iran's civil nuclear program, and a little bit more besides.

What Biden has to do, is to balance the revival of a deal that many in his Administration invested heavily in, with continuous opposition by the Congress.

The confrontation on each side that insists the other has to make the first move, must stop.

It is in both parties' interests to move forward and compromise if they are to ensure the survival of an agreement designed to prevent a Middle East arms race.

Failure at the start in result of airstrikes against each other will only lead to greater instability in the region.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/us-iran-stand-off-by-dr-huma-baqai/>

US Policy on Kashmir | Editorial

Late last week, the US State Department spokesman said that the country is closely watching developments in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and that Washington continues to back direct talks between India and Pakistan. The statement was both a relief and a letdown. It was a relief because of a ‘misspeak’ a day earlier when the same spokesman went against established US policy and referred to IOK as a “union territory” rather than a disputed region. The spokesman clarified that its policy towards the issue has not changed.

However, it was still a letdown because the new statement did not really offer much, especially considering how supportive Vice President Kamala Harris was of the Kashmiri people during her unsuccessful presidential campaign. We were hoping that enthusiasm would carry through to the Biden administration, where she is the second-most powerful person. What has happened instead is that we have still not been offered any information on if or how the US would try to support the recently-agreed ceasefire in the region, let alone push for a resolution to one of the world’s longest-running territorial disputes.

The State Department has also not mentioned how the interests of the Kashmir people would be represented — the US position backs direct talks between India and Pakistan without requiring Kashmiris to be a party to those talks. The Biden administration has not even commented on the general authoritarianism that has been seen in India since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister almost seven years ago, despite increasing criticism from independent American experts and fellow Democrats. These include all four Indian-American members of Congress.

Despite this, the power of Hindutva-backing Americans is ever apparent from the fact the large crowds Modi has been able to draw on each of his visits to the US and the fact that several American politicians have admitted that they stay quiet on New Delhi’s crimes to avoid offending their Indian constituents. This, again, is despite the fact that all four current Indian-American members of the House — Pramila Jayapal, Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, and Ami Bera — and Harris, the only Indian-American Senator ever, have slammed Modi. Elections at home clearly trump human rights overseas.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2288408/us-policy-on-kashmir>

Ending Conflict in Afghanistan By Malik

Muhammad Ashraf

The peace deal brokered between the US and Taliban—courtesy the sterling role played by Pakistan to bring the two sides on the table—on February 2020 had raised the hopes for the end of a nearly two-decade-old conflict in Afghanistan. But unfortunately, things did not unfold as envisaged. Immediately after the deal was announced, President Ashraf Ghani refused to accept the swap of prisoners which was a precondition for the commencement of intra-Afghan dialogue on March 10, 2020 in Oslo, Norway.

This development led to a surge in attacks by the Taliban on government security forces. In the 45 days after the agreement, the Taliban conducted more than 4,500 attacks in Afghanistan. On June 22, 2020, Afghanistan reported its bloodiest week in 19 years during which 291 members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) were killed and 550 others wounded in the 422 attacks carried out by the Taliban. At least 42 civilians, including women and children, were also killed and 105 others wounded by the Taliban across 18 provinces.

It was in this backdrop of enhanced violence in Afghanistan that on July 1, 2020, the US House Armed Services Committee overwhelmingly voted in favour of a National Defence Authorisation Act amendment to restrict President Trump's ability to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan.

The second round of talks commenced on January 5, 2021 but regrettably no progress has been made on substantive issues. The Taliban did not agree to ceasefire and continued with their attacks. They accused the US of not keeping its side of the agreement while the former put the blame on them. It was in the backdrop of this situation that the Biden's administration declared to review the Peace deal. Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said in January 2021 that the United States would review the peace agreement to withdraw its remaining 2,500 soldiers from Afghanistan by May 2021.

The US has come up with a new peace plan and its special envoy for Afghanistan has discussed it with Taliban leaders at Doha and also has met with

COAS General Bajwa on March 7, along with General Austin Miller—commander of the US forces in Afghanistan—to enlist Pakistan’s support for the new initiative. Earlier, he was in Kabul where he shared the roadmap developed by the Biden administration to advance the peace process.

The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinkin also wrote a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, outlining a four-point plan for the Afghan endgame. The plan includes a UN-sponsored meeting for foreign ministers of Pakistan, Iran, Russia, US, China and India to adopt a ‘unified approach’ on Afghanistan, a new inclusive government which would supervise the national elections and a 90-day ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Russia has also launched an initiative to host a conference of representatives from Pakistan, China, Iran, US as well as the Afghan government on 18 March as part of an attempt to break the deadlock in the slow-moving peace process. Pakistan has already agreed to participate. According to the Russian foreign ministry, the focus of the conference would be on ways to help advance intra-Afghan talks in Doha, reducing the level of violence to end the armed conflict and helping Afghanistan to develop as an independent, peaceful and self-sufficient state that would be free from terrorism and drug trafficking. It is pertinent to point out that Russia had also hosted a similar meeting in Moscow 2018 where the Afghan Taliban were, for the first time, given an international stage. The US attended the meeting as an observer.

It is needless to emphasise that Pakistan, Russia, China and Iran have an abiding stake in peace in Afghanistan and there is a general consensus among them on the peace process culminating in a political settlement. They recognise Taliban as a legitimate political entity enjoying public support in Afghanistan. They have a resolve to not allow Afghanistan to slip into civil war which will have its fallout for them as well due to their geographical proximity with it.

Pakistan undoubtedly has the highest stake in peace in Afghanistan as it is inextricably linked to peace within its own territory and the elimination of the scourge of terrorism. Pakistan as a frontline state in the war against terror, has suffered the most in terms of men and material and it would be the last country to wish the continuation of strife in Afghanistan.

My considered view all along has been that the regional countries have a greater stake in peace in Afghanistan and can better ensure the implementation of the settlement plan that would emerge as well as provide iron-clad guarantees to ensure that it would hold.

The Taliban and the Afghan government must also adopt flexibility in their taken positions keeping in view the long-term interests of Afghanistan. They should not let this opportunity go waste. They owe it to the people of Afghanistan to restore peace in the country. The Taliban must agree to a ceasefire, paving the way for furthering the peace process on agreed lines and the Afghan government must also give up its insistence on its mandated tenure. They must realise that the US, in spite of its commitment to leave Afghanistan, would not make an exit before a political settlement is reached between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Malik Muhammad Ashraf

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Source: <https://nation.com.pk/12-Mar-2021/ending-conflict-in-afghanistan>

Population Growth in the World By Atle Hetland

We don't talk much about the world's population growth nowadays, in spite of the world's total population now having reached 7.8 billion, up from about 1.6 billion in 1900, and over 6 billion in 2000. At independence, or rather when the census was made in 1951, Pakistan had a total population of about 75 million, which included about 33.7 million in West Pakistan, which is today's Pakistan, and 42 million in East Pakistan, which is today's Bangladesh. Today, Pakistan has about 223 million people and an annual growth rate of about 2 percent (2019). Pakistan's population will, according to UN forecasts, reach 350-400 million people by 2100.

If we look at the African continent, which also has a fast population growth, we find that the continent had a total population of about 177 million people in 1950 and it grew almost 8 times to more than 1.35 billion in 2020. By 2050, UN forecasts suggest that Africa's population will continue to grow fast, and by 2100 reach well above 4 billion, constituting some 40 percent of the total world population. Asia's population might by 2100, approach 5 billion, and Latin America, some 0.8 billion. Europe will have some 0.75 billion, and North America will have just below 0.5 billion. Australia and Oceania will have some 75 million people.

As we see from these forecasts, the West's proportion of the world population will have gone down markedly, also that of Latin America, while Asia's and Africa's populations will have grown in real numbers and as a proportion of the estimated world population of about 11 billion in 2100 (up from close to 8 billion in 2021).

Is this dramatic? Well, it depends on the eyes that see, and it depends on what countries and continents we talk about, whether it is a stagnation, decline or increase in population. In the interdependent world we already live in today, no country or region is in vacuum. But how things will be in the future depends on many things, especially food production and distribution, technologies that will be used, and more. Important will also be the quality of education and the access to education and other social services, and whether economic development has moved towards greater equality, especially in poor countries but also in rich

countries. In today's rich countries, it is likely that there will be a decline in per capita income and resource use, yet, hopefully with a more equal distribution within the countries, and a lower consumption of the world's resources. Today's resource consumption in the West is unreasonably high in absolute and relative terms compared to other countries, and it is unsustainable, especially if we think that the poorer countries should reach a higher standard of living. Well, as for the latter, the standard of living and quality of life may actually not necessarily decline if the resource consumption declines in the West. Many will argue that there are positive aspects to lower resource consumption and greater environmental harmony and equilibrium.

Those of us who have studied demography and population issues recall Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), a British philosopher and economist, and in many ways the first demographer. His theories and predictions, indeed his pessimistic views, created tremendous debate. He thought that even if food production and distribution increased, it will inevitably be outrun by population growth, and again lead to shortage, famine, disease, conflict and war. This was called the Malthusian catastrophe or population trap. Malthus was a devout Christian and believed in the couple's self-control (abstinence) to curb population growth. New-Malthusians advocate the use of contraceptives. Let me add that if Malthus had lived later, when the results in the Industrial Revolution and in medicine had been more visible, his views might have been modified or very much different.

Opposite to Malthus' negative views are the positive views of Dr Hans Rosling (1948-2017), a Swedish professor of international health, with extensive work experience in developing countries, especially in Africa. He became a cherished and award-winning public speaker, opposing conventional wisdom in many fields of international development, underlining that most things in our world have become better in recent generations, not worse, as is too often claimed. Many of Rosling's engaging and enlightening public lectures and shorter talks are available on YouTube. More detailed statistics and other material are available in his books, including a book published posthumously in 2018 with Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Rönnlund, his son and daughter-in-law, entitled 'Factfulness: The Reasons Why We Are Wrong about the World—and Why Things are Better than You Think'. Ola and Anna continue Hans Rosling's important work through Gapminder Foundation.

As for population growth, Rosling's optimistic and realistic message is simple, notably that if people in developing countries are to get better living conditions, with better education, health and more, the family sizes will become smaller, yes, almost automatically because of the decisions people will make. He refers to Sweden in the early 1960s, when Rosling went to school, and the world's population was about 3 billion (1 billion in the rich countries and 2 billion in the poor countries). In Sweden, people's ambitions were to have further education, have a better house, purchase a car, yes a Volvo, if they could, and otherwise increase their standards. In developing countries, people's ambitions were to feed the family better, get some or all the children into primary school, buy shoes and improve the basic everyday situation. Many of the terrible disparities from Rosling's youth between the rich and poor countries are gone, but many still exist. Many people in poor countries live better than ever, with much lower child mortality than before, and then the number of newborns goes down, and the number of births and family size goes down. There are many good reasons for improving living standards and decreasing inequality in the world; one is simply reduced population growth. When people get better off, Rosling says that they will voluntarily decide on planning their families to be small with natural family planning and the use of contraceptives. Yet, Rosling also explains that people will live longer, and that will lead to a population growth in the world, but not beyond 11 billion, he claims, perhaps even a billion lower.

True, a total world population of 11 billion people is no joke, and we need to plan and act well to make the globe a liveable place for all those, with much greater equality than today—and if we don't, Rosling's predictions will not come true. However, with better educated and more knowledgeable people, and greater political participation, there is a good chance that people will indeed shape the future to be better than the past. Of course, we also need to manage global warming and climate change, and other big issues, indeed pandemics which are likely to happen even after corona is over. We need to pollute less and be better caretakers and stewards of nature. We have already realised that this is necessary, and now it is a matter for politicians and the rest to implement the necessary regulations and changes in the public and private sectors.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/11-Mar-2021/population-growth-in-the-world>

Biden Builds Bridges To Contend With Beijing – Analysis By Ryan Hass

In 1949, American strategists feared that Soviet advances were generating an intensifying threat to the free world. That August, the Soviet Union broke the United States' nuclear monopoly by successfully detonating an atomic device. Washington worried that Moscow's build-up of military forces could be a prelude to an offensive against western Europe and the Middle East.

In response, former US secretary of state Dean Acheson led an effort to formulate a government-wide response. The result was NSC-68, a strategy document that concluded that massive rearmament would be necessary to ensure the viability of the free world.

Acheson distilled his thinking in a 1950 speech at the White House, arguing that 'the only way to deal with the Soviet Union, as we have found from hard experience, is to create situations of strength. Wherever the Soviet detects weakness or disunity—and it is quick to detect them—it exploits them to the full'.

There are clear limits to historical analogies between the US–Soviet rivalry at the onset of the Cold War and the tense competition that exists between the United States and China today. Nevertheless, the core logic that Acheson articulated in 1950 — that the United States must build 'situations of strength' with like-minded nations to respond to challenges posed by rival powers — is a central organising principle for how the Biden administration plans to compete with China.

This approach is informed by a judgment that, as in 1950, the United States and its main partners are aligned in support of important objectives — peaceful settlement of disputes, prevention of great-power conflict, promotion of an open and rule-based economic system, and the need for international coordination to tackle transnational challenges. Additionally, Washington and its main partners share broad interests in urging Beijing to forgo its bullying behaviour and accept greater responsibility for finding solutions to global challenges.

But alignment in support of common objectives will not automatically generate unity of effort. Unlike in 1950, when the United States produced 50 per cent of

global output, every major economy in the world today maintains deep connections with China. As a result, no country is willing to join a bloc to oppose or contain Beijing.

To the extent that Washington proves able to collect the weight of key countries to deal with Beijing from a point of maximum advantage, it will be on an ad hoc, issue-by-issue basis. Countries will join the United States in seeking to influence Beijing based on their own priorities and how China relates to them. For some, the goal might be to push Beijing to halt its problematic behaviour. For others, it might be to press China to invest more in addressing global challenges such as pandemic response.

To weave together issue-based coalitions, the United States will need to meet partners where they are, rather than demanding that they accept Washington's perception of a China threat. Building common purpose with partners will not be exclusively animated by China. Rather, the guiding principle will be forging habits of coordination with friends wherever possible. The first-ever Quad leaders meeting on 13 March provided an early directional indicator of such efforts.

With European partners, such efforts could work towards setting common climate change ambitions, which could then inform joint efforts to push Beijing to accelerate its timelines for achieving its climate targets. There also could be space for productive trans-Atlantic cooperation to accelerate technological innovation, shore up international trade and investment rules, combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and uphold human rights and democratic values.

With ASEAN partners, US policy might be tailored around the priorities of the region's youthful and dynamic population. Specific projects might focus on expanding access to information and opportunity, developing human capital, demonstrating leadership on climate change or improving local public health capacity. Such efforts could pay dividends over time by elevating America's appeal and creating a more fertile environment for coordination on specific issues relating to China.

The United States must simultaneously allay concerns among partners about being 'forced to choose' between the United States and China. The inescapable reality is that China's importance to other countries is growing. It is the world's largest trading power and the leading engine of global economic growth.

Given this reality, the United States will need to give allies space to pursue their own interests with China, even while they partner with the United States on priority issues. Washington will also need to demonstrate — through its own words and actions — that it supports developing a constructive relationship with China, even as it prepares to push back strongly against problematic Chinese behaviour.

Somewhat counterintuitively, the more Washington is seen as responsibly working to develop durable relations with Beijing, the more diplomatic space it opens for cooperation with others on China. Washington's partners will feel more comfortable working with the United States on issues relating to China when doing so is not perceived as an expression of hostility towards China.

The Biden administration's approach to China reflects a subtle but significant departure from the Trump administration's more direct approach of confronting China. President Biden and his team recognise that the results of their strategy may not be visible for some time and do not harbour illusions of changing China overnight. They intend to play a long game. If their approach bears fruit, the United States will fortify its capacity to compete with China from a position of strength.

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Domestic Divisions Leave Blanks In US Asia Policy – Analysis By Gorana Grgic

In the flurry of analyses of Joe Biden's early policy moves, there is a common thread that depicts the 46th president as an agent of change towards predictability in policymaking, and a much-desired course correction after the chaotic Trump years.

In undoing the political and reputational damage done by his predecessor, Biden has a hefty task of convincing both Americans and America-watchers that the United States still occupies a central role in the international system and can act as a force for good.

Much like the famous rhyme for marital success, Biden has decided to opt for 'something old' and surround himself with people he has had a track record working with. His foreign policy team comprises long-time practitioners and experts, many of whom were integral to the Obama administration and the Clinton cabinet.

The new administration will work to prioritise diplomacy, elevate multilateralism and incorporate values in the conduct of foreign policy. But there is also the 'something new' aspect of Biden's nascent foreign policy doctrine that will differentiate it from his Democrat predecessors. Biden's foreign policy will be more constrained by situational factors at home and abroad. Deep political divisions and multiple crises — emerging from or amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic — will limit his presidential attention and action. And as the world grows more unstable, uncooperative and illiberal, US foreign policymakers will have significantly less room to manoeuvre.

Rather than a radical departure from the Trump era, there are still elements from the previous administration that could qualify as 'something borrowed'. While the new administration is talking up cooperation on transnational issues such as climate change, global health and arms control, it is bound to maintain the inherited competitive disposition towards China. It has made it abundantly clear that economic statecraft will remain a vital aspect of its strategy.

Yet, there is uncertainty around the policy specifics, much of which will hinge on contingency planning and bureaucratic politics. While we can only speculate as to what Chinese foreign policy will look like over the next four years, there is less room for guesswork when it comes to the key divides in Biden's team.

First, there is the question of setting policy priorities. There are some well-founded fears that a divide over traditional and non-traditional security issues is beginning to drive a wedge through the administration. On one hand, there are those who believe the greatest threats to the United States are of primarily kinetic origin. On the other, there are those who argue the largest threats are anthropogenic.

The former argue that the United States should maximise its military and economic capabilities to compete with China. The latter maintain that climate change is the mother of all questions that can only be addressed if the world's two largest economies work together.

Second, there is a generational divide within the top echelons of the executive branch. The President's younger appointees generally advocate for a more assertive response to China, while the older guard are wary of a new Cold War.

Finally, the interaction of bureaucratic and domestic politics will have a decisive impact on Biden's policy direction. The Obama years are a telling example of the long road between strategic planning and policy implementation. Obama began his first term with a dovish outreach to China, but as China appeared to grow more assertive the more hawkish response advocated by the State Department became the preferred policy. The infamous 'pivot to Asia' was never fully implemented because US domestic politics and partisanship got in the way of ratifying the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and attention to seeing through this agenda in Obama's second term shifted with the reprioritisation of the Middle East and Europe.

What these variables might look like during the Biden years remains to be seen. Nonetheless it is not wildly imprudent to assert that bureaucratic rivalries will surface and affect the formulation of policies. Partisan politics and the slimmest of margins in Congress will further complicate policymaking. Key questions — such as how much competition with China is productive and the merits of

Washington's decoupling strategy — will also create domestic winners and losers who will lobby for their preferred outcome.

The early signals point towards President Biden's willingness to confront Chinese leadership over a whole range of issues — from unfair trading practices, gross human rights abuses in Xinjiang, crackdown on democracy in Hong to the growing assertiveness over Taiwan. Biden is far from the first US president to excoriate Chinese government's actions. The forthcoming months will tell to what extent rhetoric will be matched by policy response.

For those in Asia, there are still plenty of unknowns regarding the policy specifics. These blanks will be gradually filled as the United States heals on the home front and adapts to navigating the world after having had its credibility severely challenged under Trump.

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South Asia Peace | Editorial

THE peace process in South Asia moves in fits and starts: things look up one moment, only to come crashing down the very next. The last few years have been particularly tense, with the situation along the Line of Control volatile, while the two states came to the brink of another war in 2019 after India's Balakot misadventure. However, of late it seems that efforts are under way to cool temperatures and restart the dialogue process, apparently through the backchannel.

The first sign of this thaw came last month, when the respective DGMOs established contact and announced resumption of the ceasefire along the LoC. Further signs that something is afoot came on Wednesday when Prime Minister Imran Khan, speaking at the Islamabad Security Dialogue, said that India should make the first move to normalise ties, while adding that Kashmir was the "lone irritant" standing in the way of better Pakistan-India relations. On Thursday, the army chief made similar comments at the same forum, saying it was time to "bury the past and move forward", while again highlighting the need to resolve the Kashmir imbroglio.

The prime minister has a point because after the LoC ceasefire, India, being the bigger regional power, should initiate the dialogue process. Earlier on, Mr Khan had also said that if India takes one step towards peace, Pakistan will take two. The fact is that in the current atmosphere, the resumption of the dialogue process itself will be a major achievement. A state of perpetual conflict suits no one, particularly the millions of poor in South Asia, while better relations can pave the way for socioeconomic uplift for all. As the COAS noted at the Islamabad forum, South Asia is "amongst the least integrated regions of the world" and defence spending "comes at the expense of human development".

However, as positive as the signals appear, it would be premature to celebrate 'talks about talks'. Both countries have been at a similar juncture before, where negotiations had reached an advanced stage and peace seemed imminent. However, the process was derailed and soon it was back to square one. Such mistakes have to be avoided this time around and interlocutors on both sides need to tread carefully without raising expectations.

The progress achieved in earlier discussions should be built on, and so-called soft areas — people-to-people contacts; Sir Creek etc — can be a starting point to reach the tougher issues on the agenda, such as Kashmir, militancy etc. For starters, hawks on both sides must be sidelined so a conducive atmosphere is created for dialogue as there will always be noisy lobbies for war in both countries. Constituencies for peace need to be strengthened so that the complicated issues poisoning ties since independence are resolved, and South Asia can move forward on the journey of human development and economic progress.

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The World Still Needs the UN By Suzanne Nossel

Imagine a system of global governance fit for the twenty-first century. All nations would be bound to codified precepts restraining the use of force, fostering peaceful conflict resolution, upholding the rule of law, and enshrining respect for human rights. Grand-scale negotiating forums would shape new rules to avert crises and foster cooperation on issues including climate change, pandemics, and migration. Great powers would wield influence but be held in check by one another and a rotating cast of middle powers from every region. Countries big and small, rich and poor would participate, guaranteeing their stake in the system. Civil society organizations, businesses, and popular movements would have channels to influence decision-making. The convening body would include an array of specialized arms capable of providing technical assistance, overseeing cooperation, measuring progress toward priorities, meeting humanitarian needs, and quelling conflicts. Expenses would be shouldered based on each government's size and wealth.

Creating such a system afresh in the 2020s would be impossible. Major countries would never agree on objectives or values, much less concede to being legally bound by them. Human rights principles would be disputed and rebuffed. Beyond the United States and China, it would be impossible to agree on which powers deserved special prerogatives. Power-hungry sovereigns would insist on cutting out civil society entirely. Treasuries would refuse to pay the bills for activities their governments did not fully control.

The United Nations remains the closest thing to a system of global governance that the world has ever known and may ever achieve. And yet, as the COVID-19 pandemic makes painfully clear, the system can be paralyzed, distracted, and dysfunctional just when it is needed most. The paradox of the UN—an organization only as good as the collective will of its member states—is that it embodies so much potential alongside so much disappointment.

No single country, organization, or institution can dictate the future of global governance. The world is too complex, diverse, and fractured to allow for that. Cooperation between the United States and China is essential but not sufficient.

Neither countries nor peoples around the world want to submit to the whims of the world's two most powerful players. To lead, Washington and Beijing need forums to rally support and reckon with opposition. A strengthened system of global governance, if it is to be, will involve overlapping forums, institutions, and coalitions that collectively shoulder the world's challenges. The UN has a central role to play within such a system. Any effort to reinvent global governance should focus on reinvigorating the body invented to serve as its linchpin.

The UN stands at a crossroads, with an increasingly assertive China and Russia testing the organization's founding ideals of human rights and the rule of law. There is an ambitious effort underway to remake the United Nations into a body in which powerful governments can work their will free of the normative constraints embedded in the UN's founding purpose. To preserve the United Nations as it was intended—as a forum for transnational problem solving and a force for the rights, freedoms, and well-being of all people—countries committed to those core precepts will have to overcome their entrenched ambivalence toward the organization and shore up its relevance. If they fail to rise to the challenge, they will find themselves seated in a world body emptied of principle and reshaped to serve authoritarian agendas.

Reinventing the UN will require member states to renew their original vows to the ideals of international cooperation. Wistfulness over an elusive, utopian system of global governance that never was must not be the enemy of the United Nations that is or that could be. Instead, energetic diplomacy should reanimate the UN's high-minded foundation and repudiate those who seek to hollow out its principled pillars and leave behind a brittle shell for interest-based realpolitik. UN personnel and leaders will need more freedom from political influence to make sound decisions and get things done. The UN will also need visible achievements that reposition it in the eyes of skeptical governments and peoples. Ultimately, reviving the UN will require subordinating narrow national interests to the task of protecting the world's best hope for solving grave global threats.

SPECIAL FROM THE START

The UN has been unique since its inception. Founded after World War II, when the United States was morally ascendant and accounted for over half the global economy, the UN represented U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's vision of a global system that reflected U.S. ideals. The trauma of the war and the power disparities left in its wake subsumed what might have otherwise been mortal

disagreements over control, values, and rights. For adherents to progressive precepts, including individual freedom and justice, the UN system is uniquely aligned, a global edifice enshrining those principles. The UN's universal membership; broad foundation of shared, legally grounded liberal principles; and expert capabilities would be nearly impossible to replicate in a new global body. If the UN did not exist, it could not be created today. COVID-19, however, may lead to a moment when the struts and joints of the global order can suddenly be reconfigured. The ideological and politically intractable problems of the twenty-first century dictate that, rather than trying to build from scratch, nations capitalize on the UN's singularities and seize the opening to remedy its flaws.

To Western policymakers and the media, however, the UN seems to register most often for its shortcomings. Witnessing the UN Security Council seize up amid the COVID-19 pandemic and fail to agree on so much as a statement in response to the most catastrophic health crisis of modern times, they had reason to despair. Yet that frustration can obscure the essence of the UN's dysfunction: leading states' recalcitrance, indifference, and abdication. Focusing on the UN as a locus of discontent distracts from the great powers' failures and obscures the many things the UN does well.

Ritual exasperation and even dismissiveness toward the UN are hardly baseless. The organization has fulfilled its founding vision only episodically. Many of its limitations, however, are grounded in the nature of global governance itself and its uneasy cohabitation alongside national sovereignty. Global governance can only be as good as those doing the governing. The Security Council's notorious paralysis during the Cold War mirrored the standoff between the globe's two superpowers. The deadlock over COVID-19 reflected the campaigns by the United States and China to deflect blame for the crisis. The tensions that impair cooperation intensify when the stakes are high, often rendering the Security Council useless when it is needed most, such as during the grinding conflict in Syria over the last decade. On climate change, the UN has performed a vital convening function but cannot force the consensus necessary to protect the planet. The meticulous preparation, dogged diplomacy, and creative problem solving of UN Secretariat officials can only go so far. The fate of contentious negotiations hinges on the leading countries' willingness to compromise.

The UN's worst recent scandals related to the very same dependence on member states. Infected Nepalese peacekeeping battalions spread cholera in

post-earthquake Haiti, a catastrophe compounded by substandard sanitation on their base. The UN refused to accept responsibility and, even worse, wealthier member states refused to establish a trust fund for the victims. Sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, Haiti, and elsewhere is a function of lax preparation and low standards among national militaries contributing troops for UN operations. The UN has now taken forceful steps and built a potent administrative infrastructure to better train and vet troops and hold them accountable for violations. Yet contributing governments have been inconsistent in their vigilance and follow-through.

Ritual exasperation and even dismissiveness toward the UN are hardly baseless. Although some of the UN's most infamous scandals have faded into the distant past in some policy circles, contemptuousness toward the UN remains an article of faith. Certain governments with the most to gain from the organization are among the most cynical. The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other instruments embody precepts of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights treasured by liberal democracies. Recognizing these ideas as universal, rather than Western, is at the heart of the UN. This notion has new urgency as competing, illiberal ideas gain currency globally. Yet for decades, U.S. politicians on both sides of the aisle have derided the UN as a forum for Lilliputians bent on tamping down the superpower Gulliver. The United States has long complained about its bills as the organization's largest contributor, refusing to pay on time, in full, or sometimes at all. Washington also blames the UN for treating Israel unfairly, although criticism of the Jewish state is driven by member states, not the organization itself.

Despite its entrenched ambivalence, the United States has always been the UN's indispensable nation: it is the host country in New York, the UN's largest contributor, the driving force behind countless UN initiatives and resolutions, and the determinant of whether such initiatives succeed. At its best, Washington is diplomatically agile and assertive at the UN, marshaling support behind vital efforts to, for example, tackle conflicts in Africa, curb North Korea's nuclear program through sanctions, and invigorate human rights mechanisms. Only in the last few years under the Trump administration has the United States' derision toward the UN subsumed any potential for diplomatic efficacy.

Sometimes, despite its members, the UN has accomplished an immense amount, usually in areas where no other government or organization could have

possibly achieved the same. Yet the UN is not measured by the many tests that it meets. The flawed accounting results partly from the distinction between the UN itself, centered on the organization's political bodies such as the General Assembly and the Security Council, and the UN system, which includes dozens of specialized technical agencies from the World Health Organization to the International Civil Aviation Organization. The UN system's achievements include feeding more than 100 million people in over 80 countries, vaccinating almost half the world's children, saving the ozone layer, shepherding more than 500 treaties into existence, curbing the spread of nuclear weapons, deploying more than 70 peacekeeping missions, helping end colonization, and assisting nearly 60 million refugees and displaced persons. UN Special Political Missions have curbed chemical and nuclear weapons proliferation and kept volatile regions from boiling over into conflict. Other vital accomplishments include curtailing the 2014 Ebola outbreak and strengthening LGBTQ rights. The Security Council's stasis in the face of COVID-19 does not negate the World Health Organization's work to coordinate an imperfect but essential pandemic response, advance progress toward a vaccine, and assist UN agencies in providing critical pandemic relief efforts. The UN has saved tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of lives and made the world safer, healthier, better fed, more sustainable, more equal, and more just.

Despite all that, the UN's perceived limitations have led to an eroding public image. Each successive secretary-general seems to hold a lower profile than his predecessor. The last time a U.S. president mentioned the United Nations in an inaugural address was in 1960. Still, the UN's contributions should not be taken for granted.

A UN IN FLUX

The UN is no more static than the world it inhabits. A series of significant changes now underway will likely determine whether the world body endures in a recognizable form. The UN faces four interrelated challenges, each heightened in recent years: a new geopolitical system premised on an uneasy balance of power among nations with sharply divergent values and goals; the rise of governments and leaders who reject the UN's liberal framework; the collapse of liberal influence around the world due to the Trump administration's diplomatic misfires coupled with the rise of authoritarian populism in important democracies; and finally, the organization's own sclerosis in central areas, including peacekeeping.

China's diplomatic ascent is a through line across all four of these trends. Many governments historically looked to Washington for a steer on what positions to take on key UN issues, wanting to avoid being crosswise with their largest trading partner and the world's most influential country. Beijing has now moved into a position of equivalent sway on UN matters, such that delegations now assess their votes and statements against how the two capitals will react. China unabashedly uses its power and money—it is now the UN's second-largest contributor—to blunt criticism, thwart outcomes, shut out Taiwan, plug its Belt and Road Initiative, and dilute norms that might be used to hold it accountable. China's fast-growing involvement in UN peacekeeping as a troop contributor, funder, and source of Secretariat leadership also correlates with Beijing's substantial economic stake in Africa. The World Health Organization suffered a grave blow in credibility when it was criticized for succumbing to pressure from Beijing to downplay China's responsibility for the spread of COVID-19. Chinese nationals occupy a growing array of influential UN positions, including leadership slots at the and Food and Agriculture Organization and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which oversees accreditation for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

These shifts come at a moment when the imperatives of global governance are glaringly apparent: climate change, refugee flows, pandemics, natural disasters, technology, and trade-related dislocations. The world is becoming hotter, more connected, and more contagious. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said, “multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most.”

The UN and its member states stand at a fork in the road. The organization has always been a hybrid between a value-neutral forum that bolsters international cooperation and conflict resolution and a force that promotes liberal norms, such as democracy and human rights. As Adam Lupel of the International Peace Institute has noted, this hybridity helps explain some of the UN's stark anomalies, including the presence of notoriously repressive governments, such as China and Russia, on the Human Rights Council. Both of those UN functions—its role as a neutral forum that catalyzes action and its power as a force that enshrines the values in its underlying treaties—are now under severe pressure, for related but distinct reasons.

COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CRISIS

As a forum to foster collective security, address conflicts, and encourage cooperation, the UN suffers from certain governments' waning willingness to subordinate national interests and domestic politics to international norms and standards. The presence of three permanent Security Council members—China, Russia, and the United States—that are willing to block collective action in the service of their competing individual interests has the potential to cripple consensus building to a greater extent than the Cold War did. For Beijing, protecting China's global image and avoiding domestic instability are existential objectives. Russian President Vladimir Putin has staked his leadership on building up Russia at the United States' expense. For Trump's United States, catering to a domestic political base overrode conventional foreign policy objectives. The Biden administration recognizes the United States' stake in steadying teetering global norms. But it has also committed to promulgating a foreign policy that meets middle-class American voters' interests and is more closely tied to domestic policy considerations. During the Trump years, the UN was dominated by three myopic and insecure global powers that lacked the will, the internationalist spirit, and the farsightedness to lead. The imperatives that motivated the UN's founding 75 years ago took a back seat to more mercenary goals. The result placed a growing set of issues—Crimea, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the South China Sea, Syria, and even COVID-19—outside the council's reach. The Biden administration now faces the challenge of restoring U.S. influence within the world body and restoring the UN's own efficacy and standing at the same time.

With major conflagrations largely off-limits for the council, collective security has lately operated nearer the margins. The council mainly addresses outbreaks in Africa, where the vast majority of peacekeepers are deployed. There, collective action faces a different set of constraints, stemming from the reluctance of member states to empower the UN to tailor its interventions for the conflicts it seeks to temper. UN peacekeeping operations were originally designed to help implement peace agreements after hostilities ceased. The guiding principles that underpin peacekeeping missions were reformulated in 2008, and they now emphasize that the UN should involve itself only with the consent of the warring parties, remain impartial, and not use force. These principles were developed based on decades of lessons learned and the political and operational constraints of nations contributing troops.

The UN is no more static than the world it inhabits.

Yet recent missions in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and South Sudan bear little resemblance to those envisaged in peacekeeping doctrine. When the UN is called upon to get involved, usually in the name of protecting civilians, the conflicts are still active. They involve armed militias, criminal syndicates, and ideological extremists who sow chaos across borders. Peace agreements are often nonexistent. Rogue actors stand aloof from negotiations. Foreign governments hold limited sway. UN peacekeepers risk being seen as partial to rulers who may themselves be fueling conflicts and atrocities. To stand a chance, peacekeeping operations must be intertwined with full-blown diplomatic efforts bearing the UN's complete capabilities. Yet special envoys can face an overwhelming array of duties spanning intensive mediation to the daily management of sprawling field operations. Despite successive blueprints for peacekeeping reform, the UN has yet to reckon with the widening disconnect between the peacekeeping services it provides and the elusive peace it seeks to make and keep.

The peacekeeping budget is another vulnerability, linked to Washington. Despite a deal in 2000 that reduced its UN dues, the United States has routinely underpaid its share of the peacekeeping budget. Washington's failure to pay it dues in full and its policy of paying up at the tail end of the UN's fiscal year have now spread to other nations, causing persistent cash flow problems.

The combination of a hamstrung Security Council and an ossified approach to UN peacekeeping undercuts the UN's role as a forum for collective security. In other areas of collective action and cooperation, however—especially in response to threats that don't derive from an aggressor nation, such as climate change and poverty—its record is better. Through eye-popping reports and aggressive facilitation, the organization has catalyzed global momentum behind emission limits that require genuine concessions from nearly every region. Despite valid critiques of the UN's Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, there is no denying that these efforts jump-started work toward alleviating global deprivation. Although these development initiatives get little play in security circles, research proves that socioeconomic advances helps prevent and ameliorate conflict. Successive decades of UN progress toward alleviating disadvantage worldwide may ultimately do more to prevent and resolve transnational conflict than the Security Council ever did.

AN ORDER UNDER FIRE

The liberal order has been both under attack and in voluntary retreat, a dangerous combination that has threatened to unravel the UN and set back rights, freedoms, and justice worldwide. The UN's founding was shaped by the belief that preventing future conflicts would hinge on a universal commitment to inalienable human rights. A geographically representative committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt drafted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). In her memoirs, Roosevelt recounted that the Chinese representative insisted that the document "reflect more than simply Western ideas" and integrate the principles of Confucianism. When the draft was adopted by the UN's then 58 member states, committee member Hernán Santa Cruz of Chile described "a truly significant historic event in which a consensus had been reached as to the supreme value of the human person, a value that did not originate in the decision of a worldly power, but rather in the fact of existing."

Other instruments supplemented the UDHR, together forming an international bill of rights and spawning hundreds of global and regional human rights pacts. The tectonic shift toward global recognition and respect for human rights that Cruz trumpeted in 1948 is now in jeopardy. China's global rise and Russia's assertiveness are chipping away at the normative foundations of the international order. Liberal democracies have never fully complied with human rights precepts, and many are guilty of gross offenses themselves. Yet to varying degrees, these states have historically embraced those aspirations.

For authoritarian countries, by contrast, formal acceptance of universal human rights principles has been accompanied by a superficial and self-serving approach that upholds many rights in name only. Elections and criminal trials can provide a veneer of legitimacy to mask brute power and preordained results. Yet while the codification and universal adoption of human rights norms has failed to guarantee their protection, it has helped. The obligation to report to the UN's human rights bodies and reply to UN investigators creates incentives for good behavior and redress of abuses. The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court have reinforced those norms. The recognition of universal human rights has spawned a global movement of NGOs that hold their governments accountable and a culture of media call-outs that deters abuse and stigmatizes its perpetrators.

China's economic and geopolitical rise and, to a lesser extent, Russia's ambitiousness are now gradually remodeling the global order to match these nations' rights-defying worldviews. Never fitting into the liberal, rights-based paradigm, these governments see an opening to shake off their chafing constraints and reinvent a twenty-first-century order that fits their national aspirations. They seek to scale back, water down, defang, and invert the principled underpinnings of global governance. Examples abound. Both countries have used their veto power liberally and strategically, blocking repeated efforts to protect civilians in Syria, uphold democracy in Venezuela, and safeguard Muslims in Myanmar and denying human rights NGOs accreditation and access. Both countries interpret national sovereignty strictly, insisting that the principle of noninterference with internal affairs overrides human rights considerations. Although Russia's efforts in this regard are more fitful and opportunistic, China's military, economic, and diplomatic muscle must be taken far more seriously.

The liberal order has been both under attack and in voluntary retreat.

As China's global influence grows, human rights norms are eroding. The mass internment of a million Chinese Uyghurs is proceeding apace, with little international outcry. After 39 countries joined forces at the UN to call out Beijing's repression in Xinjiang and intensifying authoritarianism in Hong Kong, 45 others joined a retort engineered by Beijing and fronted by Cuba. China is also utilizing its economic influence to curtail rights beyond its borders, including by kidnapping Chinese nationals and constraining Chinese students studying abroad. Governments, corporations, scholars, and analysts who resist Chinese tactics are punished. The worldwide adoption of Chinese communications technologies and social media platforms is globalizing Chinese norms, including its constraints on speech and license to surveil. China's highly visible prosperity through tight social controls serves as a model that is influencing others: democracies including Brazil, Hungary, India, Poland, and Turkey are backsliding.

China's growing challenge to liberal, rights-based norms at the UN has coincided with the implosion of global leadership that once supported those rights. U.S. human rights advocacy had already suffered major blows during the global war on terror initiated by President George W. Bush, damage that was partially undone during Barack Obama's presidency. The Trump administration's flouting of press freedom, praise of autocrats, denial of immigrants' and refugees' rights, backtracking on women's and LGBTQ rights, intolerance of political dissent,

corruption, nepotism, and lies made a mockery of the United States' checkered but historic role as a global human rights standard-bearer. Washington's strained relations with its traditional allies also undercut its ability to push back against Beijing. While the Trump administration became increasingly exercised over Beijing's waxing influence at the UN, its scornful ineptitude in rallying support at the UN left its diplomats crying into the ether. During the same period, internal machinations over Brexit, the refugee crisis, and then the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with pockets of repressive populist nationalism on the continent, left Europe ill equipped to fill the void of Western leadership at the UN. The Biden administration is determined to reverse these trends, a tall order that will depend upon prioritizing the resurrection of the United States' status at the UN even as other demands abound.

These realignments risk cracking the normative foundations of the United Nations. Recent secretaries-general, including António Guterres and Ban Ki-moon, have been unwilling to call out major rights abusers by name for fear of antagonizing key member states, especially China. When China's own rights record comes up for review by the UN Human Rights Council, Beijing engages in elaborate pageantry, with government-controlled NGOs and friendly delegations enlisted to heap hollow praise. In 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini of Jordan, declined to run for a second term, voicing despair at the system he led and scorning the UN's member states for thwarting attempts to hold abusers accountable.

THE UN THE WORLD NEEDS

Mounting pressure on the UN's central pillars—collective security and the commitment to human rights and the rule of law—may spell the organization's steepened and perhaps irreversible decline. Some analysts argue that the ship can be righted by casting the UN's normative infrastructure overboard, a weight too heavy to bear given the geopolitical shoals that must be navigated now. They believe that, given China's rise, a global order that sidelines universal rights in favor of sovereignty and value-neutral cooperation can achieve collective security. The premise is that forfeiting the facets of the UN that most rankle China—human rights resolutions, the protection of minorities, and the like—would unleash consensus on a breadth of global issues such as climate change and global health, in effect saving the global forum.

Deciding between saving the UN and protecting universal rights is a false choice and one that champions of global governance must reject. The UN's founding pillars—development, peace, security, and human rights—are interdependent. Most issues that have paralyzed the Security Council in recent years have hinged on human rights concerns: humanitarian access in Syria, the crisis in Venezuela, and the treatment of the Palestinians in Gaza. Sidestepping human rights and humanitarian concerns will not dissolve impasses over the Security Council veto; these problems are at the heart of what divides the council and outrages the world. Moreover, most of what the Security Council does agree on centrally implicates human rights concerns, including conflicts in the Central African Republic, Congo, Mali, and South Sudan. The UN Charter was a compact among peoples, as well as countries, to advance their interests and well-being. The UN's visionary founders recognized the human suffering caused by the wanton exercise of sovereign prerogative and aimed to constrain such impulses. Collective security and the protection of human rights are inseparable. To sideline human rights would be to betray the UN and drain away the organization's remaining moral and political authority.

The quest to revitalize the United Nations should proceed on multiple, parallel tracks. There is no magic bullet that will transform today's global governance system into a potent, fit-for-purpose successor. That will depend on boosting the stakeholders' buy-in, building on strengths, confronting weaknesses, and staying the course over time.

The first step to reviving the UN is to decide that the effort is worth it. Liberal governments need to recognize that the UN represents the best shot they will ever have to fortify globally what they regard as universal beliefs and values—and that time is running out. The United States in particular must renounce the self-defeating ambivalence, standoffishness, and periodic belligerence that have long characterized its relationship with the UN. Sophisticated analysts, including longtime U.S. Foreign Service officer and former UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and National Security Adviser Susan Rice, have spotlighted the UN's potential as a force multiplier for U.S. interests and pointed out that strategic, comprehensive, and dogged diplomacy can overcome many of the UN's most frustrating dynamics. Effective U.S. engagement is a prerequisite for the UN's vitality. Without U.S. leadership, vital reforms will be out of reach, divisions will deepen, and the UN will fail. The United States' abdication of leadership during

the Trump administration became a self-fulfilling prophecy. When the United States does not exercise its influence, outcomes are unfavorable, and Washington's exasperation grows. Trump officials' fulminations over China's mounting sway at the UN fit this pattern; Beijing's voice got louder while Washington's was either silent or jarringly off key.

To halt this dynamic, the Biden administration, led by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, will need to work with China on issues including climate change and COVID-19 while winning back diplomatic capital ceded to Beijing and countering Chinese and Russian efforts to weaken the UN. Playing this multidimensional chess game—involving a mix of cooperation, containment, and confrontation—will require U.S. embassies to center UN priorities within bilateral relations and diplomats in New York to play a sophisticated ground game to build relationships.

To ensure that they are backing rather than thwarting these efforts, members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives should form bipartisan caucuses to end decades of indifference at the UN. With the backing of these supporters, the United States should fund its contributions in full and expand its voluntary donations. Washington should also nominate highly qualified, capable Americans, not limited to government officials, to top UN Secretariat posts. These modest investments will pay off by both expanding U.S. influence and creating a more effective world body. And Washington should cooperate visibly with UN human rights bodies, providing human rights rapporteurs with the information and access they request when investigating matters involving the United States. By exemplifying what it means to be a good member, the United States can rally others to be responsible stakeholders and stigmatize those that manipulate or pervert the system and its values.

KEEPING THE PEACE

The United States' diplomatic reengagement alone will not be enough to revive the UN. The UN should also reimagine its approach to peacekeeping. The rising disconnect between the UN's traditional operations and the violent conflicts it is charged with quelling have bred a crisis of confidence. An updated peacekeeping doctrine would reflect the reality that many current UN missions need greater leeway to use force, work amid nonconsenting parties, and protect civilians over the long term. An internal, informal group comprised of Secretariat leaders and committed member states should candidly inventory the factors that impede the

success of peacekeeping operations and examine how to prevent some member states from hampering peacekeeping efficacy. The Secretariat must be empowered to resist imposing mandates that are incompatible with peacekeeping doctrine and to help craft approaches to meet needs—such as civilian protection and counterinsurgency—that do not fit neatly into existing categories. This will help strengthen peacekeeping and make it more widely relevant, fortifying the UN's capacity to guarantee peace and security.

Another major barrier to international cooperation and collective security is the Security Council's composition. A decades-long debate over how to update the Security Council's fossilized structure remains hopelessly deadlocked with, at present, no real prospect of sweeping change to improve representation and better reflect contemporary power relations. Despite that impasse, the UN's credibility depends on showing that the council is neither frozen in time nor impervious to demands for greater accountability.

The UN's vitality depends on the commitment of the council's permanent members to keeping the veto from spelling the end of global collective action. A first step would be adopting a practice whereby all vetoes are accompanied by a public, written explanation. That would form the basis of an open meeting of council members during which veto-wielding countries agree to answer questions and publicly discuss alternative measures to address the conflict at hand. Having to face the music after a veto could enhance accountability and disincentivize the veto on the grounds of national interest as opposed to collective security. Another way to press for greater accountability in the Security Council would be to rally the General Assembly to make use of the "Uniting for Peace" provisions that allow the body to act when the council will not. Even the threat of possible General Assembly intervention has occasionally catalyzed progressive movement in the council. If the council members come to worry that the forum's prerogatives may be supplanted, its members might be more open to the changes necessary to shore up their authority. Individual nations should also consider alternative global forums, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the G-7, and NATO, as vehicles that can be activated to pressure the Security Council. The council's structure will change only if those who benefit from it come to believe that their prerogatives are being undermined from the outside. They must believe that they are better off reforming the body before it is supplanted by another entity in which they will enjoy less power.

A RAINY DAY FUND

When nonprofits seek to buffer themselves from downturns, they build rainy day funds that they then invest. Interest proceeds from the funds can pay for a portion of their annual operating expenses. After the pandemic-driven recession, the UN should explore approaching wealthy governments and philanthropists to support a fund that would insulate it from the perpetual threat of financial crisis. The endowment should not become a substitute for the annual contributions of member nations to the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets, but it could fill gaps in the current funding system. Earnings could avert cash crunches and fund unexpected expenditures, such as the trust fund for victims of the Haiti cholera outbreak.

The UN needs more than funds, however. It also needs individual leaders who are unafraid to speak out, knock heads, and call out bad actors. The specter of UN secretaries-general and other top officials currying favor in top capitals to assure reelection has undercut the UN's influence and credibility. The terms of service for the secretary-general and the high commissioner for human rights should be shifted from the current system of two five-year terms to a single eight-year term. That would allow sufficient time to build relationships and carry out changes but avoid the pressures of reelection. Moreover, many senior UN leaders are effectively beholden to their bosses back in their capital of origin. These officials serve two masters—a formula for conflicts of interest that can disadvantage the UN. Those who serve in the top ranks of UN leadership should be required to resign from their national civil or foreign service ranks, ensuring that their only professional loyalty would be to the UN. Finally, the UN should end the practice of dual hatting its special envoys with the tasks of high-level, intensive mediation among warring parties and the management of complex field operations. Diplomatic troubleshooting amid a crisis is a full-time occupation. Special envoys imbued with the organization's authority to intervene should be assigned seasoned, empowered deputies who can handle the duties of managing to humanitarian and development programs aimed at fostering stability.

HUMAN RIGHTS UP FRONT

The anniversaries of UN treaties and agreements should become occasions for governments to recommit to their values and stanch further slippage. Every five or ten years, during meetings of heads of state in New York, the UN should convene summits to reaffirm core human rights instruments—including not only

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights but also the Convention Against Torture and many others. The UN could thus revive global commitments to these vital ideals.

Although renewed commitments to existing human rights norms are essential, shoring up the UN's value system cannot stop there. With authoritarian governments determined to undercut the system, liberal governments should go on the offensive, pushing new initiatives that extend and clarify rights, inspire rising generations, and demonstrate the vitality of the UN's human rights mechanisms. The Obama administration followed such a strategy, running for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council and using that platform to advance new UN resolutions on LGBTQ rights and free expression online. The Biden administration has announced that it will run to retake the U.S. seat renounced during the Trump era. By setting the agenda and rallying allies, liberal governments can marginalize those paddling in the opposite direction. Specifically, a campaign for full LGBTQ and gender rights—including the right to marriage, to build families, and to be free from discrimination based on gender identity—could catalyze wider national protections. The UN has never fully elaborated protections for artistic freedom nor recognized the growing role that artists and cultural creators play in providing space for dissent and social change. There is also major work to be done to reconcile the broad international legal protections for free expression with the challenges of the digital age, including the dangers posed by some forms of online content, shadowy algorithms that can promote disinformation, and the rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Rights to privacy also demand further enumeration and protection amid new forms of intrusion and a fast-evolving social bargain whereby privacy is voluntarily traded for various social goods and conveniences.

Finally, for better or worse, in the 2020s, photos, social media, memes, and viral videos shape global discourse. The UN is remembered most for its theatrical moments—Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe on the table, Colin Powell giving his fateful PowerPoint presentation before the Iraq war, Donald Trump eliciting laughter for tooting his own horn in his UN address, and young heroines such as the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai and the climate activist Greta Thunberg issuing bold challenges to heads of state. In considering how to constrain human rights abusers, the answer increasingly lies not in traditional diplomatic pressure but in public outrage. The prospect of tanks rolling through

Hong Kong in a Tiananmen Square reprise is less viable in a world of cell phone videos. The UN should take advantage of this change, integrating video and imagery into human rights reports and presentations. The UN's history of negative press has rendered the organization cautious about the media. But the digital age demands that statecraft encompass stagecraft. The UN needs to recruit skilled media professionals to harness modern communication tools and elevate compelling voices, host historic encounters, stage major announcements, and otherwise position itself as the visible centerpiece of global diplomacy.

The denouement of the COVID-19 crisis will represent high noon for the UN and the world order writ large. Governments and peoples may recapture the spirit of internationalism: a set of shared interests that coexist alongside parochial national concerns and—when necessary—override them. Major capitals may yet recognize that the UN represents a vital, vulnerable pillar of a liberal global system that is on the verge of collapse and needs intensive care. They may seize on the opening created by the pandemic to push through updates to the UN that position the organization for heightened relevance and efficacy. They may recognize that efforts to limit the UN to protecting narrow national interests must give way to accommodating the imperatives of the institution and the world as a whole.

If governments that are committed to the UN's original vision and values assert themselves and lead this process, they can strengthen the United Nations amid an unprecedented assault, pressing authoritarian states to heed human rights and the rule of law. On the other hand, continued scorn and neglect of the UN will pave the way for a fast-expanding illiberal influence within the institution, eroding the delicate balance of power that is at the heart of global governance. That will undermine the UN's normative underpinnings, fuel exasperation among liberal governments and civil society, and subject the UN to a relentless tug of war between hostile superpowers. Reconciling the UN's paradox—its vast capacity to achieve and to disappoint—requires a deliberate decision to recognize the world body's limitations and to unleash its potential despite them.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2021-03-18/world-still-needs-un>

Challenging Roadmap to Peace By Maleeha Lodhi

THE Biden administration has launched its first diplomatic initiative to accelerate the Afghan peace process even as it continues its review of Afghan policy. This is reflected in a leaked letter from Secretary of State Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani that sets out its proposed plan. It is also evident from the discussion draft of a peace agreement shared by the US with Afghan parties and the regional diplomacy now underway by special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

These moves signal three things — a renewal of US commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan, its desire to do so after securing a peace settlement among the warring Afghan parties and the willingness to use pressure to quickly achieve this. This raises several questions. Is the Biden administration overreaching with an ambitious plan that it wants to accomplish in a limited timeframe? In deciding to mount pressure on the parties does the US have the leverage to get them to agree? Is the proposed ‘new, inclusive’ interim government an achievable goal as bitter foes will have to share power? With Washington having drafted a peace agreement, albeit for discussion, will Afghan parties take ownership of this?

The Biden team is vigorously engaging Kabul, the Taliban and other Afghan leaders in discussions over the peace plan and the May 1 deadline for US withdrawal with the proviso that final decisions will emerge once the review concludes. President Joe Biden has said that meeting the May 1 deadline will be tough but it won't be extended by “a lot longer”. Meanwhile, the Taliban have warned against any delay in this deadline and of an unspecified “reaction” if this happens.

The US diplomatic initiative — according to the leaked letter — has four elements. One, a meeting to be convened by the UN of representatives of Russia, the US, Pakistan, Iran and India to forge regional consensus to support the peace plan. Two, a draft peace agreement to expedite negotiations on a settlement and ceasefire. A key proposal is to set up a transitional government once agreement is reached. Three, Turkey to host a meeting between the two sides to seal a peace deal. And four, a 90-day reduction in violence to avert a

spring offensive by the Taliban. This plan is punctuated by the US warning that it is considering full withdrawal of forces by May 1 but not ruling out other options.

The US peace plan for Afghanistan faces critical tests ahead.

By clearly communicating that a political settlement is a priority — not just the military withdrawal, as it was for president Trump — a prudent path seems to have been outlined especially as diplomatic parleys underway will shape the conclusions of the US review.

Regional consensus to back a peace deal is clearly necessary. This is also a way for Washington to ensure that Iran is included in the diplomatic process. No timeframe has been set for this. But the UN will have to deftly play the role expected of it. Moscow, while welcoming the transitional government idea, has not said anything on the US plan and is embarked on its own regional diplomacy including a peace conference hosted last week on Afghanistan. The Pakistan-India dynamic also has to be kept in view; Islamabad has already conveyed its misgivings over India's inclusion in the proposed conference to US officials.

With two new processes now envisaged in addition to that in Doha it would be important not to allow the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha to be diluted or complicated by the proposed new ones. They should facilitate the Doha process and not replace it. The principal diplomatic effort should remain in the Doha talks.

Washington is clearly in a hurry. Trying to force the pace of the peace process reflects US frustration with the stalled intra-Afghan talks. It also shows impatience with President Ghani's obstructive tactics, evident from the tough tone of Blinken's letter. The tight timeframe in which the US wants a settlement done and dusted aims to compel the two sides to negotiate seriously. Even so the expectation for negotiations to yield an expeditious outcome runs up against an ineluctable reality that the tough compromises needed for an agreement are unlikely to emerge quickly just because Washington has set a deadline. The US can intensify pressure on both sides but that doesn't mean it has enough leverage over them to reach a speedy settlement. A senior Afghan official recently told PBS that the US has adopted a "fast food" approach, forcing everybody to consume something that is "too quick to succeed".

There is also the question of whether in order to expedite the process Washington has overprescribed the elements of an agreement — drafting one itself rather than letting it emerge from negotiations. This lays it open to being viewed as an ‘imposed’ solution. While the US says it is not seeking to dictate terms and its peace agreement is a discussion draft it is yet to be determined whether Afghan parties see it the same way.

The idea of a transitional government, vehemently opposed by Ghani, makes sense before a more permanent government can be installed following adoption of a new constitution and elections. But can the two sides and other Afghan leaders show the accommodation needed for a workable power-sharing arrangement? In an initial response a Taliban spokesman asserted that interim governments have proven ineffective in the past but the Taliban have yet to take a firm position.

Pakistan’s interest lies in the success of intra-Afghan talks that can produce a negotiated end to the war and a lasting settlement before the full withdrawal of US forces. That is what Islamabad means by its repeated calls for a “responsible withdrawal”. It does not want its neighbour to descend into political chaos or a civil war, and sees an inclusive post-settlement government in Kabul as the best way to ensure peace and stability. It seeks assurances that Afghan territory will not be used against Pakistan. US officials have also been told that Islamabad stands ready to do what it can to help the peace process. It is however up to the Afghan parties to seize the moment as the US plan starts to unfold and faces critical tests in the months ahead.

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Heart Of Asia | Editorial

While the United States (US) is facing a dilemma over the current situation in Afghanistan, the 9th ministerial meeting of Heart of Asia—Istanbul Process (HOA-IP) will kickstart from March 29. Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi will lead Pakistan in the regional initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey.

The main theme of the conference will be finding a way out for a secure and stable Afghanistan so that regional security, economic and political cooperation centred on Afghanistan can be promoted. Thus, the FM will visit with regional cooperation and the Afghan peace process in mind, as Pakistan's role is very crucial on the two subjects.

However, the key question relates to engagement with India on the sidelines of the conference. Some experts fear that New Delhi might try to turn the meeting into yet another event of Pakistan-bashing as it did in 2016. But others are optimistic that the two sides might use the forum to bury the acrimonious past and look forward to a more cooperative future.

Barcelona pay tribute to Cruyff on anniversary of death

This optimism stems from the recent message of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Qamar Bajwa and sporadic reports of a “secret India-Pakistan Peace Roadmap” brokered by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to the COAS, stabilised Indo-Pak relations can unlock the potential of South and Central Asia.

Given that both the civilian government and the military want to cultivate friendly ties with India, the ball is in New Delhi's court. Pakistan has once again shown to the world that it has always an appetite for peace.

The latest telephonic conversation between the US defence secretary Lloyd Austin and COAS Bajwa where the former lauded Pakistan's commendable efforts for Afghan peace is a fresh piece of evidence showing Pakistan's desire for regional peace and stability. If New Delhi reciprocates Pakistan's warm gesture, the two countries can emerge as the leading drivers of regional cooperation and progress.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/24-Mar-2021/heart-of-asia>

There Will Not Be a New Cold War By

Thomas J. Christensen

For the past few decades, Chinese scholars, pundits, and diplomats have often falsely accused the United States of adopting a “cold war mentality” toward China. They usually level these accusations when Washington enhances the U.S. military’s position in Asia or bolsters the military capabilities of its allies and partners in East Asia.

It is true that in the post–Cold War era, the United States and its allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific have been engaged in a strategic competition in the military sphere with China, which has been modernizing its forces and increasing their power projection capabilities. Thus far, the United States has successfully deterred mainland China from settling its many sovereignty disputes in the East China Sea, in the South China Sea, and across the Taiwan Strait through the use of force. It is also true that the United States and its closest allies have banned the sale of weapons and have tried to limit the transfer of certain military technologies to China.

Until very recently, that is as far as a cold war analogy could fly. The United States’ Cold War containment of the Soviet Union and its allies in the 1950s and 1960s was a full-spectrum effort that went beyond the military realm. That effort was designed to limit economic contact with those countries and cripple their economies at home while frustrating their diplomacy abroad. In stark contrast, since the beginning of China’s reform era in 1978, no actor other than the Chinese people themselves has done more to assist China’s broad economic development than the United States. Open U.S. markets for Chinese exports, large-scale U.S. investment in Chinese industry, and hundreds of thousands of Chinese students in American universities were all essential to China’s fast-paced growth and technological modernization. Moreover, the United States has asked China to play a more active role in international diplomacy, or, as former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick put it, to pull its weight as a “responsible stakeholder” on the international stage. China has answered the invitation only in fits and starts, but Zoellick’s entreaty belies the notion that Washington has been trying to prevent Beijing from gaining greater international influence for decades.

All this may now be changing as Washington's political circles grow more hawkish. Especially since President Donald Trump took office in 2017, many U.S. commentators have been predicting a new Cold War between the United States and China. They cite as evidence not only the intensifying military competition in the Indo-Pacific (which is not really new) but also more novel phenomena: the U.S.-Chinese trade war and calls for broad-scale economic decoupling; Washington's placement of Huawei and many other Chinese companies and institutions on the Commerce Department's so-called export control entities list and the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control list, which together prevent U.S. firms and institutions from engaging in business activities with those Chinese entities without a license; the December 2017 National Security Strategy lumping China and Russia together as adversaries; and the Trump administration's sweeping description of China's international economic policies as "predatory." COVID-19 has hardly helped the bilateral relationship. Rather than cooperating to tackle a common problem, the United States and China have battled over who is to blame for the pandemic and which political system is more capable of responding to it.

In the second half of 2020, in various speeches, government documents, articles, and tweets, the Trump administration basically declared a cold war on China. China's behavior, it argued, was designed to overthrow the existing liberal international order and replace it with Chinese hegemony. Trump administration officials portrayed China as an existential threat to the United States and the basic freedoms that Washington has traditionally defended. As was the case with the Soviet Union, they argued, the only credible long-term solution was for the United States to lead a global alliance of like-minded states to weaken China abroad and to foster fundamental political change within China.

Critics of such a policy might say that the United States is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: by declaring a cold war, Washington is unnecessarily creating one. But nothing akin to the U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Chinese Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s is in the offing, regardless of what strategies the United States itself adopts. The Cold War was a complex set of relationships involving many countries. No single power, no matter how mighty, can create a cold war on its own.

NOT A COLD WAR

U.S.-Chinese strategic competition, which is real and carries dangers, lacks three essential and interrelated elements of the United States' Cold War with the Soviet Union and its allies: the United States and China are not involved in a global ideological struggle for the hearts and minds of third parties; today's highly globalized world is not and cannot easily be divided into starkly separated economic blocs; and the United States and China are not leading opposing alliance systems such as those that fought bloody proxy wars in the mid-twentieth century in Korea and Vietnam and created nuclear crises in places such as Berlin and Cuba. Without any one of these three factors, the U.S.-Soviet Cold War would have been much less violent and dangerous than it actually was. So although China's rise carries real challenges for the United States, its allies, and its partners, the threat should not be misconstrued. The voices calling for a cold war containment strategy toward China misunderstand the nature of the China challenge and therefore prescribe responses that will only weaken the United States.

If Washington unilaterally adopts an anachronistic cold war stance toward China, the United States will alienate allies that are too economically dependent on China to adopt entirely hostile policies. Although these allies share many of Washington's legitimate concerns about Beijing's policies, most U.S. allies and partners do not view China as an existential threat to their own regimes' survival. If President Joe Biden maintains something akin to the Trump administration's cold war posture toward China, the United States would only weaken itself by undercutting the greatest competitive advantage the United States holds over China: alliances and security partnerships with over 60 countries, many of which are the most technologically advanced states in the world. Compare this with China's rogues' gallery of partners: North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe come to mind.

One might argue that the real difference between the Cold War and contemporary U.S.-Chinese strategic competition is China's limited global power in comparison to the reach of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s. The United States' lead over China in overall national power around the world is still substantial. This, however, can provide Americans only limited comfort. As early as 2001, I argued that China was developing major asymmetric coercive threats to U.S. forces and to U.S. bases in East Asia, a region of geostrategic significance. China is much more powerful in the region than it was then and is already much more powerful than any single U.S. ally in Asia.

No single power, no matter how mighty, can create a cold war on its own. The maritime disputes between China and Japan, Taiwan, and several Southeast Asian states (including the U.S. ally the Philippines) pose the greatest risks of involving the United States and China in direct conflict. Fortunately, as Oystein Tunsjo recently argued, crises and even conflicts over such maritime disputes, though dangerous, should be much more manageable than conventional U.S.-Soviet conflict on land in central Europe would have been during the Cold War. States cannot easily seize and maintain control of maritime territory. Moreover, with the important exception of Taiwan, disputed islands, rocks, and reefs near China are not tempting targets for invasion.

Beyond power differentials and geography, three other factors render contemporary U.S.-Chinese strategic competition less dangerous than the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. If the United States and China were both leading opposing and economically independent alliance blocs based on fundamentally opposing ideologies, the U.S.-Chinese strategic competition would quickly move on to land and could easily spread from East Asia to all corners of the globe. Even if China were unable to project its own military power to challenge the United States in far-flung areas of the world, it could supply, train, and support ideologically compatible, pro-Beijing proxies that could then attack U.S. allies and partners in those regions. In other words, the current regional U.S.-Chinese rivalry in East Asia could go global. It would look much more like the Cold War, since local conflicts between U.S. and Chinese proxies would be backstopped by U.S. and Chinese nuclear weapons and long-range conventional strike weapons.

Fortunately, this is all still in the realm of political science fiction. There is little evidence that China is trying to spread an ideology around the world or that its relations with other countries are based on an ideological litmus test. Some observers made a lot out of President Xi Jinping's statement at the 19th Party Congress in November 2017, when he argued that China's path could be an alternative to the so-called Washington consensus. "The path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence," said Xi. His statement seems aimed more at justifying the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) form of rule and economic policies than calling to export a "China model" abroad.

Xi's subsequent statements after the Party Congress support this interpretation. The December 2017 Dialogue with World Political Parties, hosted by Beijing, included representatives of 300 political parties from 120 countries. At the Dialogue, Xi denied that China was exporting an ideological model, stating, "We do not 'import (shuru)' foreign models, nor do we 'export (shuchu)' the Chinese model; we cannot demand other countries to reproduce (fuzhi) the Chinese way of doing things." This dialogue would have been a prime occasion for Xi to evangelize the China model. In fact, the CCP in the reform era has consistently added the term "with Chinese characteristics" to its description of Beijing's brand of so-called socialism, which relies on market pricing for growth and suffers from much higher inequality than most avowedly capitalist states, including the United States. It is difficult to export a model if its own advocates say that it requires deep roots in Chinese history and culture.

CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS?

Beijing is authoritarian and often frighteningly repressive at home, constructing mass "reeducation" camps in Xinjiang and repressing Tibetans, dissident political voices, journalists, and human rights defenders. Unlike Russia, however, which actively attempts to undermine democracy in eastern Europe and beyond, China seems agnostic about other countries' domestic structures. Instead, Beijing appears much more concerned with those countries' postures toward the CCP's rule at home, Chinese sovereignty disputes, and economic cooperation with China, in that order of importance. A RAND report cleverly refutes the Trump administration's lumping together of Russia and China: "Russia Is a Rogue, Not a Peer; China Is a Peer, Not a Rogue." A former Chinese diplomat stationed in Russia, Shi Ze, summed up the difference between Moscow and Beijing this way: "China and Russia have different attitudes. Russia wants to break the current international order....Russia thinks it is the victim of the current international system, in which its economy and its society do not develop. But China benefits from the current international system. We want to improve and modify it, not to break it."

Like Moscow, though, Beijing has adopted illiberal methods to influence opinion around the world. Laura Rosenberger, a highly experienced U.S. government official, has argued in these pages that Beijing has adopted Russian-style Internet attacks to undermine confidence in democracy. Her article focuses on examples of disinformation campaigns in Hong Kong, but her lessons almost

certainly apply to Taiwan as well. China's behavior in these regions that it claims as its own, however, does not appear representative of Beijing's policies abroad. China's influence operations in foreign countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and even the United States have also been cited as examples of ideological revisionism. While concerning, these are fundamentally different from the attacks on democracy in Hong Kong and Taiwan. During the COVID-19 crisis, Beijing's "Wolf Warrior" diplomats and media outlets lashed out at foreign governments and commentators that criticized China's initial handling of the crisis and decried its lack of transparency and free speech. The same holds for foreign criticism of Beijing's repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang or suppression of dissent by Chinese intellectuals, lawyers, journalists, and human rights activists. But rather than trying to undermine those nations' liberal democracies, Beijing has focused its efforts on changing those countries' attitudes and policies toward CCP rule and preventing governments from supporting other disputants in Beijing's many sovereignty disputes, including in the Taiwan Strait.

A Stanford University Hoover Institution report is perhaps the most prominent critique of China's attempts to influence foreign countries. Even this report, however, argues that Beijing's goals are largely meant to protect CCP rule from external criticism, rather than to export China's authoritarian model abroad. China's approach does not target foreign democracies themselves and is a far cry from Mao's or Stalin's support of communist revolution abroad.

Beijing's attempts to gain influence are still a serious problem for free societies, even if they are not the basis for a new Cold War. By using money to influence elections and media coverage and by pressuring academics and students to adopt positions acceptable to Beijing on the topics mentioned above, the CCP is harming important institutions in free societies, even if it is not undermining the foundation of liberal democracy writ large. That harm is potentially serious enough to warrant the vigilance not only of governments but of academic leaders and journalists.

China's approach is a far cry from Mao's or Stalin's support of communist revolution abroad.

Elizabeth Economy notes that local Chinese governments hold classes for foreigners in government effectiveness. Some of the pupils are academics and experts, and others are government officials from neighboring states. China also conducts classes in governance and economic development in authoritarian

environments such as those in Cambodia and Sudan. This practice might come closest to CCP authoritarian evangelism. But it would be much more concerning and likely to create a cold war environment if China were training pro-authoritarian parties and groups in otherwise democratic countries about how to seize authoritarian control of their states and destroy democracy. This would resemble Soviet and Chinese communist support of international communist organizations in the early Cold War. Current Chinese education programs seem primarily to be an effort at public diplomacy, showing the world that the Chinese governance model works and is legitimate despite criticism from the United States and other democracies about China's lack of civil liberties and democratic elections.

Until Trump took office, the United States arguably had a more ideologically fueled foreign policy than China. This tendency is likely to return with the Biden administration. The United States supported democratization and backed pro-reform “color revolutions” in North Africa, the Middle East, central Europe, and Central Asia. Trump, however, largely abandoned this traditional bipartisan form of ideological revisionism under the banner “America first.” Trump also abandoned liberal institutional reform efforts such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and even attacked existing multilateral economic agreements that the United States created, such as the World Trade Organization. Finally, Trump seemed comfortable dealing with foreign dictators and was as likely to criticize liberal democracies as authoritarian states. Trump's tenure therefore pushed the United States and China even further from the ideological Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. China did not export its ideology as it did in the Mao era, and the United States no longer exported its own in the Trump era.

The closest thing to an ideologically driven effort by the Trump administration in East Asia was the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” campaign with four of the leading regional democracies: the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. This so-called Quad or Security Diamond was Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's brainchild and could hypothetically create a geographic and political arc of sorts around China. The four countries' security cooperation is improving but still falls far short of a cold war–style multilateral alliance, especially when considering the inclusion of traditionally nonaligned India and all Quad members' strong economic ties with China itself. Other important U.S. democratic allies in Asia, including South Korea and the Philippines, seem to want nothing to do with a multilateral security effort aimed at China, especially an ideological one.

Moreover, actual or potential U.S. regional partners, such as postcoup Thailand and communist Vietnam, do not qualify for an ideologically oriented alliance and do not want to choose between the United States and China.

ENDING THE OWN GOALS

Biden's approach to China is appropriately rooted in rebuilding frayed relations with U.S. allies and partners. Many of these actors share U.S. concerns about China's assertive behavior abroad and its unfair economic practices at home. The Biden administration's focus on coalition building is wise, but it would be a mistake to try to base alliances and partnerships solely on shared ideology or to press allies and partners to choose between the United States and China.

Chinese experts are confident that Beijing can prevent an encircling cold war alliance from forming in the Indo-Pacific. They point out that China, not the United States, is the biggest economic partner for many of the United States' most important allies in the Asia-Pacific, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Yang Jiemian, the brother of China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi, argues that a cold war would break the transnational production chain and be too costly for U.S. allies in Europe and Asia that negotiate with China independently of the United States.

Despite tensions over sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are also economically dependent on China. Chinese analysts recognize that these states are poor candidates for a U.S.-led, anti-China coalition. Experts also note that Japan and South Korea are suspicious of each other. These tensions are aggravated by the bitter history of Japanese imperialism in East Asia and also by how contemporary political actors have manipulated, hidden, and resurrected those historical memories for electoral political advantage.

The Trump administration created two new sources of friction with allies: trade disputes initiated by the United States against its longtime allies—Japan, Korea, and the European Union; and particularly contentious and often public disputes regarding burden sharing within U.S. alliances. In the case of Japan, U.S. tariffs on both China and Japan in 2018 led to a significant warming of Japanese-Chinese relations. U.S. tariffs on Japan hurt Tokyo's interests, as did the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. What is less widely recognized, though, is that Japanese companies, like American ones,

have been hurt by U.S. tariffs on China because so many Japanese and American firms finish their manufacturing in China or sell parts into supply chains that have China as their endpoint and the United States as a major target market. In October 2018, Abe was the first Japanese prime minister to travel to China in several years. Overall diplomatic and economic relations between the two most powerful countries in Asia seem to be warming. What holds for Japan also holds for Korea, which saw a drop in its exports of semiconductors, a key Korean industry, after the U.S.-Chinese trade conflict began.

The Biden team recognizes that alliances and partnerships are the United States' greatest strength in competition with China. Avoiding the Trump administration's own goals of weakening those relationships would be wise and should prove relatively easy. It would be a mistake, however, for Washington to assume that U.S. partners and allies want to side with the United States against China on many issues or that they might assist Washington in slowing Chinese economic growth or limiting Chinese international influence as the U.S.-led alliance system did toward the Soviets during the Cold War.

It would also be a mistake to center U.S. alliance policy or multilateral diplomacy on an ideological struggle with Beijing. Many important potential U.S. partners, such as Vietnam or Thailand, are not like-minded states, and many liberal states that are potential U.S. partners, such as India and South Korea, do not want to base their strategic cooperation with the United States on a zero-sum approach toward Beijing. The same can be said for many states within the European Union. The EU shares a number of U.S. concerns about China's abrasive diplomacy and assertiveness in the decade following the financial crisis of 2008. The EU is in the process of developing ways to better protect member states from intellectual property theft and espionage. In a March 2019 security paper, the European Commission even called China a "systemic rival promoting alternative forms of governance." But the same European Commission strategy paper emphasized the need for cooperation and economic integration with Beijing and even a "strategic partnership." And in late December 2020, the EU concluded a broad bilateral investment treaty that should link European economies even closer to China in the future. This is hardly a cold war.

THE LIMITS OF CHINESE INFLUENCE

The prospect of a cold war alliance on the other side of the U.S.-Chinese divide is even weaker. China has formal alliance relations only with North Korea and a

strong security partnership with Pakistan. China has enjoyed especially close relations with a few members of ASEAN, particularly Laos and Cambodia. Still, these relations have mostly prevented ASEAN from taking a unified position against China in the South China Sea disputes. They haven't bolstered China's ability to project power abroad or to counter the U.S.-led alliance system in East Asia. One possible exception is Cambodia, where China has obtained special port rights that could facilitate a persistent Chinese navy presence there. Even there, however, Cambodian postcolonial nationalism has pushed back against such an outcome.

Through China's major Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, Beijing will likely gain special relationships with more Asian and African states, and Beijing's global influence will grow accordingly. But those special relationships are much more likely to serve Beijing by preventing such countries from adopting policies that counter China's interests, not by encouraging those countries to join an allied effort to harm the interests of the United States and its allies. This reality can still pose challenges for the diplomatic efforts of the United States and its allies. For example, Greece, a NATO member, blocked an EU human rights complaint against China after the Chinese shipping giant COSCO invested heavily in the Greek port of Piraeus as part of the BRI. Still, even here, Beijing seemed to be exploiting its special relationship to defend its political system at home, not to turn Greece into an offensive platform against NATO's security interests.

From the United States' perspective, China's most important security relationship is with Russia, another great power with considerable military wherewithal. That cooperative relationship includes joint military exercises, arms sales, and diplomatic cooperation at the United Nations to block U.S. and allied efforts to pressure or overthrow leaders such as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. But the Sino-Russian relationship does not reach the level of a true alliance. It is hard to imagine direct Chinese involvement in Russia's struggles with Georgia or Ukraine or in any future conflict in the Baltics. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine that the Russian military would insert itself directly in a conflict across the Taiwan Strait or other East Asian maritime disputes. In fact, Russia sells sophisticated weapons systems to Vietnam and India, rivals in China's sovereignty conflicts.

The strongest force for bringing Russia and China closer together is their shared aversion to previous U.S. administrations' pursuit of regime change and so-called

color revolutions in areas ruled by repressive regimes. China has not attempted to undermine democracies in the way that Russia has, but it often joins Moscow in international forums to oppose the efforts of the United States and other liberal democracies to pressure countries over domestic governance failures and humanitarian crimes. Chinese-Russian cooperation on such issues has been strongest in Syria, as the two states vetoed multiple draft resolutions critical of the Assad regime and in Venezuela, where the United States has called for the overthrow of President Nicolás Maduro's regime.

China is indeed famous for its investments in resources and infrastructure in the most democratically deficient parts of the world. Equally important, China exports its surveillance technologies (such as high-resolution cameras and facial recognition software) for profit, potentially bolstering some of the world's most repressive governments. Especially if the United States jettisons "America first" and returns to its traditional posture of fostering democracy abroad during the Biden administration, this practice will be of serious concern. Still, China sells such equipment to any willing buyer, regardless of regime type, so it would be an exaggeration to say that this export policy is designed to spread authoritarianism and undermine democracy. China also does significantly more business with the advanced economies of the world, including many liberal democracies allied or aligned with the United States in Asia and Europe. In fact, according to the 2016 China Statistical Yearbook, the United States and seven of its allies made up eight of China's top ten trading partners. Given that CCP legitimacy at home requires economic performance, it would be foolhardy for Beijing to alienate the advanced liberal democracies that supply valuable inputs for Chinese manufacturers, assist China in its technological development, and provide final markets for manufactured goods produced in China. Although Beijing and Russia will continue to resist U.S. attempts to support color revolutions, only Russia, which is much less integrated with global production chains, will likely support the spread of illiberal forms of government abroad.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Globalization, interdependence, and transnational production are, of course, two-way streets, and many advanced economies with liberal ideologies depend on China for their own economic well-being. China is the largest trading partner of important U.S. allies and is also a major target of their foreign direct investment. And while many of these actors have been nervous about China's turn away from a more reassuring and moderate foreign security and economic policy since the

financial crisis of 2008, they do not yet share Washington's increasingly frequent portrayal of China as a major security or ideological threat. This is why calls to seek cold war-style decoupling from the Chinese economy is not only unrealistic but unwise. The United States' network of over 60 global allies and security partners includes many of the most advanced, high-tech economies in the world, including Australia, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. This U.S.-led security network is what gives the United States the power projection necessary to be a truly global superpower. China's lack of a similar network limits its power projection greatly. Many U.S. partners would likely side with the United States if a rising China were to become aggressive and expansionist.

Chinese elites almost certainly know this. That is one of the many reasons that a rising China has remained relatively restrained. China has not been in a shooting conflict since 1988 and has not been in a full-scale war since 1979. Deterrence works and is likely to continue to work under the right set of military and diplomatic conditions. Absent an unexpected turn by China toward aggressive military adventures, no U.S. ally would sign on to a U.S.-led cold war containment policy toward China. The Trump administration itself lacked full consensus on the purpose of policy initiatives such as the U.S.-Chinese trade war. Was the plan to create leverage to open up the Chinese economy further and thereby create deeper U.S.-Chinese integration? U.S. allies who face market closure, state subsidies, and international property rights violations might welcome this plan. But if U.S. tariffs and other restrictions were simply designed to slow Chinese economic growth, a position much more akin to a cold war strategy, then the United States would quickly lose allied support.

A consensus formed during the Trump administration, however, that in certain high-tech areas such as 5G communications, it would be best for the United States and its allies to forgo deep integration with certain Chinese providers, such as Huawei. Here, the Trump administration had strong domestic backing in both parties for a policy that would prevent the United States and its key security partners from relying on Chinese systems. Moreover, the race to set the initial standards for 5G around the world has enormous implications for future business transactions, the next generation of industries built on artificial intelligence (AI), and the development of future automated weapons systems.

Until Trump took office, the United States arguably had a more ideologically fueled foreign policy than China.

In these limited but important sectors of the economy, competition with China very well might look like a zero-sum, U.S.-Chinese cold war long into the future. The high-tech arena might resemble the military arena since the arms embargo was created in 1989, with the United States trying to do as much as possible to limit Chinese progress in 5G and AI. But even the bilateral struggle between China and the United States over 5G illustrates the low likelihood that the world will become divided into cleanly split economic blocs. Even though most U.S. friends and allies understand the security risks of having a Chinese firm such as Huawei deeply embedded in their communications infrastructure, the United States struggled to get close allies such as the United Kingdom and Germany on board to fully forgo the purchase of Huawei products and services. The United States' ability to convince like-minded states to exclude Chinese products would quickly decrease if U.S. efforts expanded from boycotting a narrow set of relevant telecommunications technologies clearly linked to national security to boycotting a much broader set of technologies. Any attempt simply to harm the Chinese economy or encourage others to decouple their economies from China's would fail in the twenty-first century.

A similar cautionary tale could be told about the U.S. government's treatment of almost all Chinese foreign economic activities, including infrastructure investment, as "predatory," as the 2018 National Defense Strategy summary stated. Such a sweeping condemnation rings hollow in East Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia, where the World Bank has identified more significant infrastructure needs than can be fulfilled even by the massive Belt and Road Initiative. Rather than complaining about Chinese loans, the United States and its allies should be competing with China in economic diplomacy. The Trump administration was wise to create and secure congressional funding (through the BUILD Act) for the \$60 billion International Development Finance Corporation. By portraying U.S. money as good and all Chinese money as predatory, however, the United States risks competing poorly with China in that arena. Most countries will still welcome Chinese investments and expansive know-how in infrastructure construction and do not appreciate being labeled dupes by the United States.

Similarly, Washington argues that China is practicing "debt trap" diplomacy by creating unsustainable levels of debt in target countries. That claim, though, is

likely to fall on deaf ears in Asia. The sole major example of a direct debt-equity swap was for a 99-year Chinese lease on the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota. This remains the exception rather than the rule. Even in that case, it is doubtful that Beijing's initial efforts were primarily designed to create debt distress that could be exploited later. Moreover, unless someone is willing to fund new projects through outright grants rather than loans—and neither EU states nor the United States seem willing to do so—any new projects are going to involve an increase in the target country's overall debt, regardless of the source of the new loans. And since market incentives alone are not drawing European and U.S. banks to invest in Asian infrastructure, China is often the only game in town. The United States' closest Asian ally, Japan, understands this reality better than the United States. Japan has not only stepped up its own infrastructure aid and investment in Asia but also expressed a willingness to partner with China's BRI efforts in places such as India.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

China's vital position in the global production chain and the lack of struggle for ideological supremacy between authoritarianism and liberal democracy mean that the rise of a new Cold War is unlikely. Two factors would need to change to produce something akin to the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. If China were to start a conscious campaign to bolster authoritarianism and undermine democracies around the world, then U.S. and Chinese allies would quickly begin butting up against each other. If Beijing were to swap out parts of the global production chain with Chinese rather than foreign producers and rely less on global markets, then China might be more willing to accept the cost of an ideological struggle. Such an outcome could also occur if countries other than China overreact to the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and fall prey to an antiglobalization nationalism that reverses the global economic trends tying China and every other major economy into the transnational production chain.

The United States and its many international partners should also be studying the results of Beijing's recent so-called dual circulation economic model. At least rhetorically, this approach aims to privilege domestic consumption and manufacturing over international linkages, although it clearly leaves significant room for the latter as well. Running in the other direction is China's recent greater opening of its financial sector to U.S. investment banks and the December 2020 PRC-EU Bilateral Investment Treaty.

If policymakers and scholars are concerned about a new Cold War, they should study China's integration with and decoupling from a highly globalized economy. They should also study developments in Chinese foreign policy toward international conflicts and civil wars in which liberal political forces are pitted against authoritarian ones. Until China breaks sharply from its recent past on both scores, a U.S.-Chinese cold war will not occur.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-03-24/there-will-not-be-new-cold-war>

How Biden Views The World – OpEd By

John Feffer

In his first foreign policy speech as president, delivered at the State Department on February 4, 2021, Joe Biden laid out his vision of America's engagement with the world. In its conventional combination of the stick of military power and the carrot of diplomacy, Biden's address heralded a return to the foreign policy status quo of the "a la carte multilateralism" that has characterized the U.S. global approach since the end of the Cold War.

As Biden explained, U.S. engagement is based, first and foremost, on U.S. global power, "our inexhaustible source of strength" and "abiding advantage." That power has historically consisted of military force, economic pressure, and diplomatic engagement. Rhetorically at least, Biden has favored a recalibration away from a reliance on the military, insisting that force will be a "tool of last resort."

In practice, however, Biden has adopted a more ambiguous position toward military power. Reflecting both budgetary concerns and public skepticism of America's recent record of military interventions, the new president has promised a Global Posture Review of U.S. military footprint overseas, which would likely lead to a redeployment rather than a radical reduction of American military power. Biden's early actions have reflected this cautious approach, ending U.S. support for offensive military operations in the Saudi-led war in Yemen but freezing some of the troops withdrawals his predecessor had instituted at the end of his term. Looking to the future, the president has promised to phase out America's "forever wars" but has also pledged to focus more on pushing back against other great powers, namely Russia and China.

Because the February 4 speech took place in front of an audience of diplomats, Biden not surprisingly focused most of his remarks not on the hard power wielded by the Pentagon but the "smart power" of diplomacy. The president pledged to renew alliance relationships that "atrophied over the past few years of neglect and, I would argue, abuse." At the same time, he stressed the importance of diplomacy even when "engaging our adversaries and our competitors."

In what marked perhaps the most significant break with the foreign policy of his immediate predecessor, Biden promised to restore the United States as full participant, if not a leader, in working multilaterally to solve global problems. He identified those problems as global warming, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, cybersecurity, the refugee crisis, attacks on vulnerable minorities, racial inequality, and the persistence of authoritarianism. Although the president mentioned a few global institutions and agreements, notably the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Agreement, the emphasis was clearly on the United States reclaiming global leadership rather than leading “from behind,” as the Obama administration famously said about its involvement in efforts against former Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

In establishing the tone of his administration’s foreign policy, Biden didn’t enunciate a new doctrine. Rather, in what might be called an approach of “multilateral restoration,” he sought to repudiate the inconsistent, unilateral, and anti-global positions of Donald Trump while placing his own administration in the comfortable, pre-Trump foreign policy mainstream that European and Asian allies have come to expect and that is embodied, for instance, in the Franco-German-led Alliance for Multilateralism. Given Biden’s role as vice president in the Obama administration and his appointment to high-level positions of many policymakers from that period—Secretary of State Antony Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, climate czar John Kerry, UN ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell—many observers believe that his presidency will represent Obama 2.0, a resumption of the globally aware, generally predictable, but periodically unorthodox foreign policy of the earlier administration.

The world of 2021, however, is very different from the one that Obama and Biden navigated across their two terms in office. New global problems have emerged such as COVID-19, while others have become more urgent, such as the climate crisis. The four years of Trump’s presidency weakened certain traditional elements of statecraft, such as arms control.

Given the persistence of American exceptionalism under Biden, it’s difficult not to view his foreign policy approach as MAGA Lite: making America great again with the assistance of foreign partners rather than over their objections. As Steven Blockmans of the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels puts it, “In all

but name, the rallying cry of America First is here to stay,” reflected in the Biden administration’s prioritization of domestic investments over new trade deals and his expansion of Buy American provisions in federal procurement. Whether represented as America First, MAGA Lite, or even liberal internationalism, the conventional U.S. approach to multilateralism has been instrumental, as a means to the end of preserving U.S. global power.

At the same time, the inconsistency of U.S. foreign policy over the years—seesawing back and forth from Clinton’s modified multilateralism to Bush’s aggressive unilateralism to Obama’s cautious multilateralism to Trump’s anti-globalist posturing—has led both allies and adversaries alike to hedge their bets by investing their political capital either in other alliances or in more self-reliant economic and security strategies. The most dramatic examples of this hedging have been China’s establishment of rival multilateral economic institutions and the European Union’s investment into autonomous military structures.

The Biden administration’s rapid use of executive orders to reverse Trump’s positions—for instance, bringing the United States back into the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Paris climate accords—has been welcomed in many of the world’s capitals. But it also confirms what many in the international policymaking community have long viewed as America’s overly volatile foreign policy. The new administration’s reversals of Trump policies extend to immigration, as Biden has cancelled the “Muslim travel ban” and ended funding for the largely unbuilt wall on the border with Mexico. He quickly hit rewind on the environmental deregulations of the Trump administration and the previous president’s approval of the Keystone XL pipeline. In addition, the Biden team has taken steps to reenter the Iran nuclear deal, has revived arms control negotiations with Russia, and plans at least to mitigate the impact of the trade sanctions against China. But if Trump could reverse Obama’s positions on all these matters, and Biden with a stroke of the pen could do the same to Trump’s reversals, who’s to say that the next president in 2024 will not perform the same U-turns?

Indeed, as it looks to engage more deeply on these issues, the Biden administration faces a number of obstacles to realizing even its modest multilateral restoration: congressional opposition, corporate lobbying, public indifference or hostility, the mistrust of allies, and bureaucratic inertia. It also must deal with a set of interlocking crises on the home front, from the pandemic

and the resulting contraction of the U.S. economy to crumbling infrastructure, endemic racial inequality, political polarization, and rising poverty rates. Finally, the administration must reckon with challenges within the multilateral project itself, including a democratic deficit and the problem of non-compliance.

But on certain key issues, such as global health and environmentalism, progressives will have an opportunity to push U.S. policy in the direction of greater equitable international engagement during the Biden years. On a case-by-case basis rather than through a transformative agenda, then, the Biden administration might alter—or be pushed to alter—the way the United States engages the world.

This is the introduction to a full-length study of the Biden administration's approach to multilateralism. Click here for the full report, produced with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

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Old World Order | Editorial

Ever since President Biden's arrival into the Oval Office, traditional US rivalries have reached yet another pinnacle of hostility. The back and forth with Russia and China has continued—and the Biden Administration has left no opportunity to issue condemnations for alleged human rights abuses in both states.

The only difference this time is that China is now perceived by the US as the most major threat. But it is clear from the US President's statements on Friday, that the bipolar world from the Cold War decades might soon be our new reality, if the acrimony continues to take rise.

While this has been obvious for several years, what is more surprising is that even regional and global developmental projects initiated by Beijing have struck a nerve within the policy circles of Washington. The Belt and Road Initiative in particular, has been seen by the US as a threat, and it looks to be seeking out support from its traditional allies in the 'west' in the UK and Europe to come up with a competing plan.

This however, is easier said than done. China's BRI has been decades in the making, and actually comes from a necessity to develop global routes that benefitted both China and states along the route immensely. CPEC for instance, grants China a crucial route into the Indian Ocean. Trading and shipping lines where Beijing could benefit with its partners were identified and developed. Even if the US starts now, it will take at least the same amount of time to get where BRI is now, and by then the belt and road might already be reaping enormous dividends.

A better strategy would be to invest in cooperation and take advantage of all that BRI has to offer. Much like India in Asia, the US is deliberately pushing itself against cooperative tendencies globally. President Biden must look to strike a different note compared to his predecessors. International politics should move past old hostilities, and chart a new course together, instead of in competition.

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Analyzing the Indian Strategy in Afghanistan

By Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai

India since Nehru's time has been trying to put itself on the path of a major player in the region on one hand and attain a global position on the other. Besides China, Pakistan is a state which challenges India in many ways that irk the former to a large extent. As a rising power, India wants to enhance its role and ensure its presence in a fragile state Afghanistan in the post-9/11 era where Pakistan had a greater role earlier. For the said purpose, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent policies Washington adopted provided a favorable ground for Delhi to adopt a proactive policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

India's major role in Afghanistan has always been suspicious for Islamabad for several reasons. Since Pakistan's inception, India was using tactics to destabilize Pakistan by supporting the elements who wanted to have a greater Afghanistan or Pashtunistan. Likewise, India is now supporting the unrest in Balochistan by using Pakistan's North-Western borders. This article deliberates upon how India by using its soft power in Afghanistan against Pakistan on one hand and making Pak-Afghan relations sour on the other.

Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime and formulation of the new political setup in Afghanistan, India's engagement with Afghanistan became multidimensional as the new administration in Kabul had cordial relations with India. Soon after the installation of the interim authority in late 2001, the Indian Liaison Office was converted to a full-fledged embassy in Kabul. Since then, India has continued to pursue a policy of high-level engagement through humanitarian, financial, and project assistance to have clout in Kabul to counterbalance Islamabad's influence in Afghanistan. Likewise, back in the 1990s, India was supporting the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance as Pakistan was supporting the Taliban, a natural choice for India. Most of the core members of the Northern Alliance were holding key positions in the new setup.

Any difference or trust-deficit between Pakistan and the Taliban might benefit India in the future which should be avoided

Indian financial aid to post-Taliban Afghanistan is roughly \$3 billion in the form of developmental projects, scholarships, infrastructure projects, food packages, roads, medical, and institutional building. Thus, India has become one of the top six donors to post-Taliban Afghanistan. India has done a number of projects in Afghanistan: 1) Afghan parliament in the capital having a library, 2) building educational institutions and provided them with aid 3) construction of energy projects like dams, 4) construction of dams and water supply channels, 5) electricity supply lines, 6) construction of health care facilities, 7) building an agriculture university, 8) energy power station in Kabul city, 9) Sports facilities, 10) cold storage in various cities, 11) telephone lines in various parts of the country, 12) television network system, 13) construction of wells and channels in many areas, 14) and rehabilitation of several water reservoirs.

Keeping in view the above-mentioned projects, it cannot be said the Indian aid is based on humanitarian grounds at all. India's major concern is to counter Pakistan in Afghanistan and destabilize Pakistan by in-filtering rebels to Balochistan. A former strategic adviser to the U.S. commander in Afghanistan Mr. Zachary Constantino maintains that India and Pakistan pursue mutually exclusive objectives in Afghanistan and leverage sharply different tools to achieve their respective goals. Furthermore, the US officials also believe that Pakistan has utilized militant groups, including the Afghan Taliban, as strategic proxies, while India places considerable weight on its soft power influence among Afghans. However, such narratives seem to hold no more weightage especially in the contemporary regional environment, where India has been evidently involved in waging proxies against Pakistan by utilizing its operatives in Afghanistan.

The Indian influence has caused a huge hatred in the minds of the Afghans for Pakistan both on a governmental and non-governmental level. Even the Afghans cannot tolerate any Pakistani visiting any of Afghanistan's cities while they, on the other hand, do businesses in Pakistan, receive education on Pakistani scholarships in the country, and enjoy the best health care facilities in Peshawar and Islamabad.

Hence, the biggest threat India feels in Afghanistan is the Taliban over whom Pakistan, as many believe, still has leverage. The Indian strategies in Afghanistan are in disarray following the US-Taliban Doha deal. India considers if the Taliban become part of the Afghan government, it would definitely not enjoy

the leverage they have had over the Afghan government following the US invasion. Any difference or trust-deficit between Pakistan and the Taliban might benefit India in the future which should be avoided. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the Taliban in the Kabul administration would likely bring peace to the war-torn country and ultimately make Afghanistan's policy balanced towards the neighboring countries.

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