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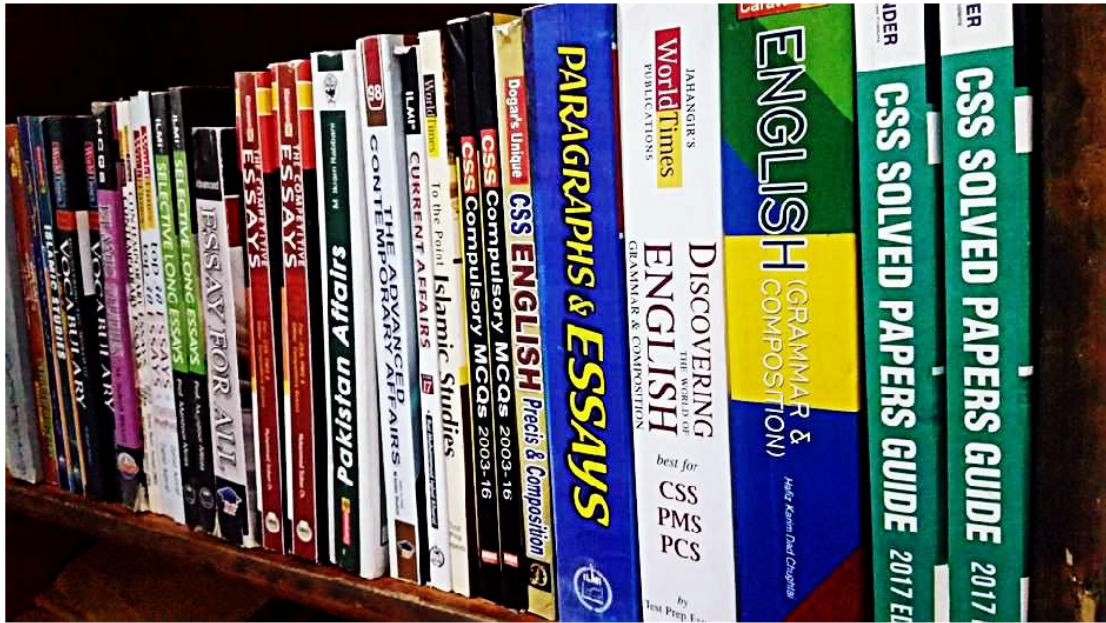
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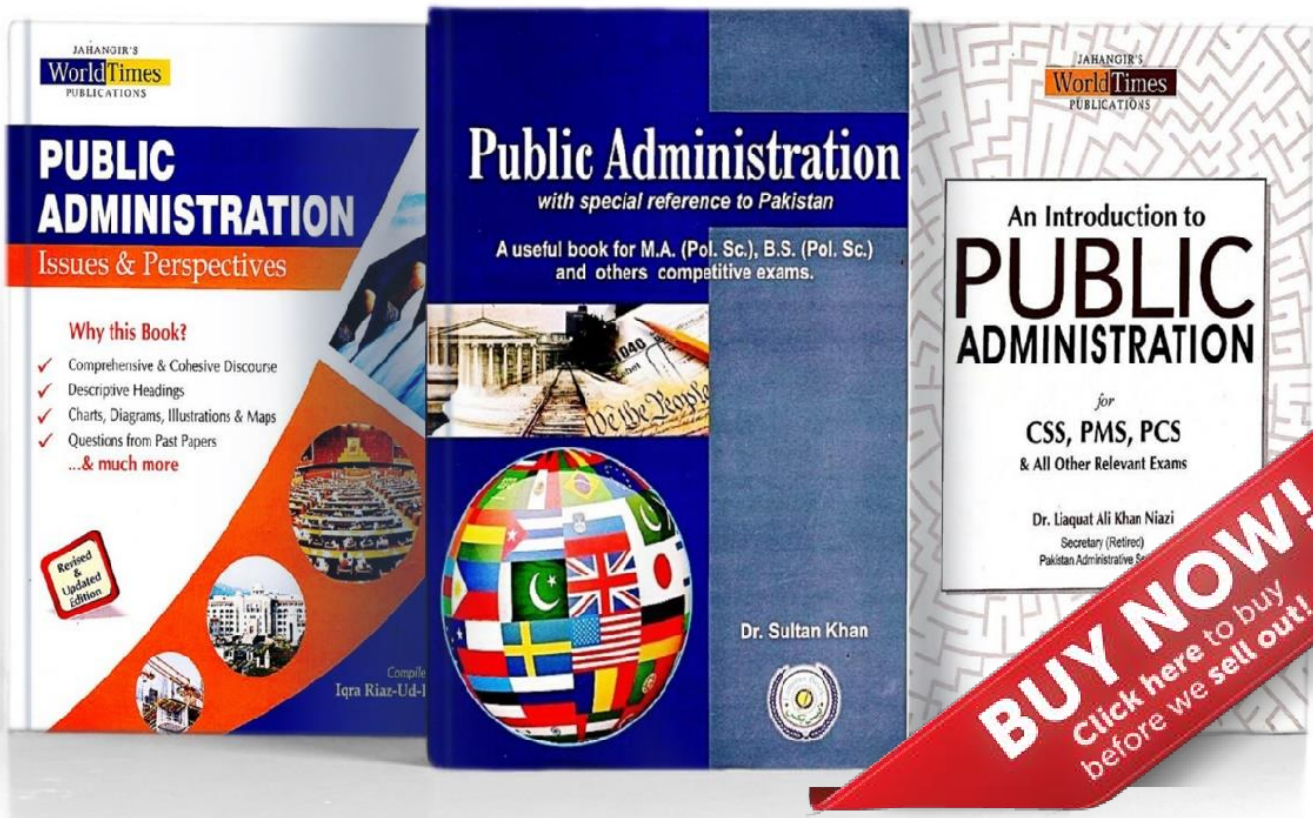
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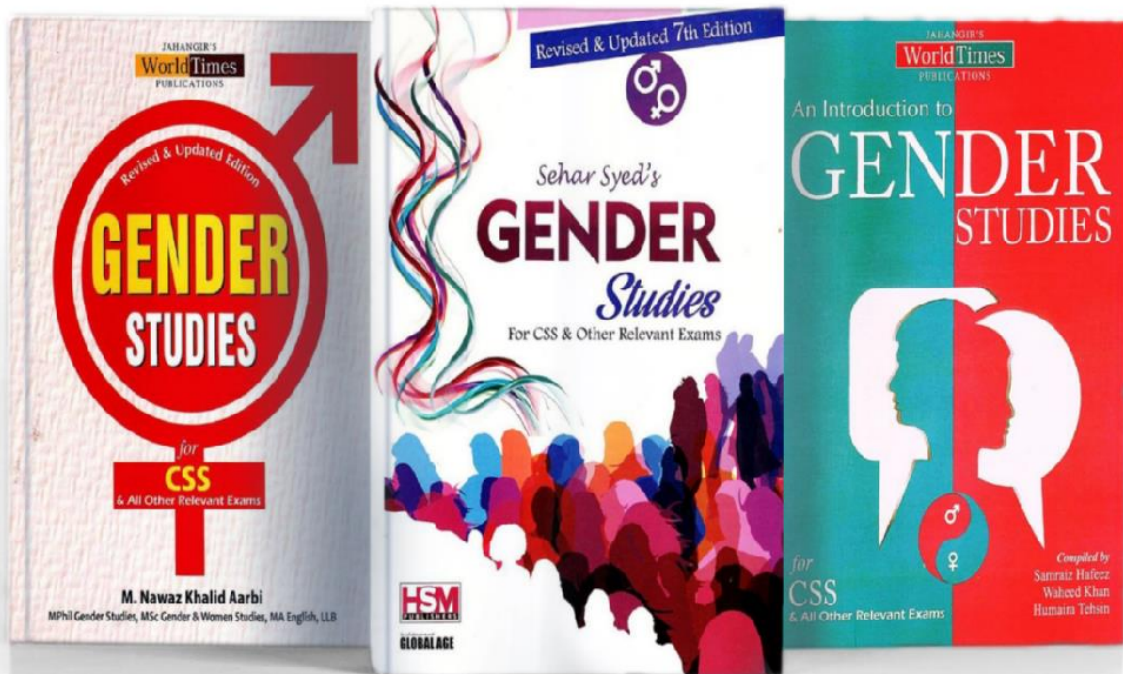
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PAKISTAN

Managing Covid-19 By Palitha Mahipala

THE Covid-19 pandemic has adversely impacted even the most resilient health systems — from individuals to communities, from daily wagers to accomplished professionals. However, Pakistan, a developing country of nearly 220 million inhabitants has fared well in its fight against Covid-19. This success is embedded in multiple factors which have contributed towards effectively managing the pandemic since its onset in Pakistan. The government of Pakistan and WHO had been closely monitoring the evolving situation and as soon as the first case was reported on Feb 26, 2020, in Pakistan the mitigation measures were already in place.

At the national level under the prime minister's leadership, the National Coordination Committee was established as an apex body which is tasked with supervising the national response towards the Covid-19 pandemic. In April 2020, the government in collaboration with partners launched a \$595m Pakistan Preparedness and Response Plan (PPRP) that chalked out a coordinated international effort in consultation with the foreign affairs ministry to support the health ministry at the federal and provincial levels.

Pakistan's vaccine roll-out has been remarkable.

The establishment of the National Command and Operation Centre was one of the stepping stones which made the Covid response pragmatic and swift. It led the coordination between various government agencies, provinces and regions. Based on epidemiological data, the model of testing, tracing and quarantine was implemented for identifying disease spread and hotspots so as to enable targeted smart lockdowns. The NCOC also oversaw the enforcement of critical non-pharmaceutical interventions such as closure of schools during peak waves, regulation of the timings of commercial activities and tourism etc.

A testament of these measures is the effective management of four distinct waves of Covid-19 since April 2020. Likewise, Pakistan's Covid fatality rate ie

124 casualties per million population and 5,536 cases reported per million population are amongst the lowest in comparison to countries in South Asia and in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Also, Pakistan's economy performed beyond expectations amid the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a 3.94 per cent economic growth rate during the fiscal year, compared to a revised negative 0.47pc in 2019-20. The government, under the umbrella of the Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme, disbursed over Rs200 billion to nearly 1.7m families across Pakistan. This valuable assistance benefited nearly 109m people or half the country's population.

The success of Pakistan's Covid response management was also acknowledged by WHO director general Dr Tedros Adhanom, who noted that Pakistan effectively utilised the well-established community health workers' infrastructure for surveillance, contact tracing and care. Dr Tedros appreciated Pakistan's approach that the choice is not between controlling the virus or saving the economy; the two go hand in hand.

For a developing country, Pakistan's vaccination roll-out programme has been remarkable. A recent significant milestone in this regard is the administration of 100m vaccine doses across the country. Moreover, special measures have been taken by deploying mobile vaccination teams which are reaching out to senior citizens, people living with disabilities and marginalised populations.

The silver lining during the pandemic has been the identification of the gaps in the existing health infrastructure, providing us with the opportunity to take corrective measures to strengthen health systems in the country. In 2016, WHO facilitated a joint external evaluation for Pakistan, which looked in detail at 19 technical areas, including pandemic preparation. As a result, comprehensive recommendations were made to improve the national health emergency infrastructure.

Notwithstanding the success of the Covid-19 response, there are a few areas where we can do better. The pandemic does not discriminate with regard to caste, creed and gender. However, data indicates that the vaccination rates amongst women are much lower in comparison to men. A similar predicament has been observed amongst the refugee population in Pakistan.

As the WHO representative in Pakistan, I state this with cautious optimism that Pakistan's Covid-19 management is headed in the right direction with a particular emphasis on close coordination, strengthening surveillance systems, tracking the evolution of new variants and investing in research and innovation. On behalf of WHO, I would like to express my profound gratitude towards the most resilient healthcare workers. They have worked and continue to do so around the clock to deliver a balanced response that has been the hallmark of Pakistan's efforts with dividends in health systems along with economic prosperity. We firmly believe in the resolve, 'No one is safe until everyone is safe'.

The writer is serving as World Health Organisation's representative/head of mission in Pakistan.

Published in Dawn, November 6th, 2021

Mending Ties By Touqir Hussain

IT is a rare moment in the history of US-Pakistan relations. Traditionally, they have either been up or down, or suffered from what is often referred to as 'benign neglect' by Washington. But right now, relations seem to be going neither up nor down. And Washington is not neglecting but ignoring Pakistan.

The reality is that Pakistan cannot be ignored. It will remain relevant for Washington because of its location at the crossroads of Afghanistan, Russia, China, India and Iran. Pakistan's relations with China impact the US Indo-Pacific strategy, and its tensions with India undermine New Delhi's capability to balance China. While Pakistan may not be able to bring peace in Afghanistan it can certainly prevent it. Indeed, Pakistan can facilitate or complicate US interests in the region.

But the problem is, Washington seems tired of the relationship. Political rhetoric on both sides is not helping either especially on the US side where there is a resurgence of US criticism of Pakistan's role in the failure of the Afghanistan war.

Yet that is not the whole picture. At a Congressional hearing in September, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that in times ahead the US will not just look at "the role that Pakistan has played over the last 20 years but also the role we would want to see it play in the coming years and what it will take for it to do that".

The reality is that Pakistan cannot be ignored.

Obviously, Washington has long- and short-term interests in mind. In the long run, the US would be interested in limiting Chinese political and economic influence in Pakistan. At the least, Washington would like to ensure that Pakistan does not undermine America's Indo-Pacific strategy.

But Washington is not focused on the long run surrounded as it is by many uncertainties principally the future of US-China tensions. Washington also sees ambiguities in Pakistan's regional policies and lack of resolve in improving the economy, ambivalence in the fight against extremism, and indifference to

creating an environment of trust in relations with Washington. No surprise that Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman had said during her recent visit to India that Washington was looking for a relationship with Pakistan that served only a “narrow and specific” purpose.

Pakistan wants a broad-based relationship but Washington is uninterested not just because of pressures coming from its extraordinary relationship with India but largely due to the uncertain US-China equation. A conflictual US relationship with China would spell trouble for Pakistan but both China and the US have been reassuring the world they do not want a conflict. At a press briefing after his participation at COP26, President Biden walked back from his earlier provocative China rhetoric.

The fact remains that the international system cannot live in perpetual tension as it enhances the risk of conflict specially with America having militarised its Asia policy with its Indo-Pacific and Quad strategies. The bottom line is that in this nuclear age war between the big powers is unthinkable for many reasons. For one, there is too much economic interdependency at risk.

China and the US are eventually going to settle on a stable equilibrium and a managed strategic competition, or what one might call a competitive coexistence and having their own spheres of influence. The question is how the US would play this competition — through undermining China by punishing the countries allied with it, or by offering them an alternative? If the latter, it would mean a flexible US approach towards Pakistan. But that is in the long run. Meanwhile, Washington’s does have short-term priorities for which a limited relationship with Pakistan is essential.

Washington is interested in Pakistan’s role in the stabilisation of Afghanistan and help with counterterrorism there for which Pakistan’s military and intelligence cooperation is critical. The US would also like Pakistan to get the Afghan Taliban’s cooperation in weakening entities like the IS-K. As the Taliban may lack the will and capacity to do this, the Americans also want to have their own operations for which they need air lines of communication from Pakistan.

How will Pakistan respond? Being economically weak and dependent on external powers, and struggling with potential instability, caused by challenges of extremism and socioeconomic discontent due to poor governance, Pakistan’s

policy options are limited. Dependency is a slippery slope. And Pakistan faces another dilemma: how to get the Afghan Taliban on board to meet American demands.

As the two countries move forward to fix their relationship there are thus plenty of uncertainties ahead to which policies of not just Washington but Islamabad and Kabul as well will contribute.

The writer, a former ambassador, is adjunct professor at Georgetown University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the National University of Singapore.

Published in Dawn, November 9th, 2021

No Change in America's Pak-Afghan Policy

By Dr Syed Akhtar Ali Shah

With a bruised sense of pride, the recent introduction of the Afghanistan Counterterrorism, Oversight, and Accountability Act by Republican senators has set off alarm bells within Pakistan, becoming the topic of emotive discussion all around. However, it does not come as a surprise to those who had kept a tab on America's strategic policy in the region.

Bashing Biden for a haphazard withdrawal from Afghanistan, movers of the bill anticipate grave implications. They are critical of abandoning an unknown number of American citizens and Afghan partners in Afghanistan because of a renewed terror threat against the US while the Taliban seek recognition at the UN despite suppressing the rights of Afghan women and girls.

The intent and purpose of the bill is to focus on the continued evacuation of American citizens, legal permanent residents and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders stranded in Afghanistan. It also suggests strategies and supervision for continued counterterrorism in Afghanistan — sanction the Taliban for terrorism and human rights abuses; authorise sanctions for individuals and foreign countries providing support to the Taliban; and place restrictions on non-humanitarian foreign assistance to Afghanistan along with a cumbersome process for SIV application and more oversight mechanisms.

The most alarming part of the bill is that it seeks to assess Pakistan's alleged role in Afghanistan before and after the fall of Kabul and in the Taliban offensive in the Panjshir Valley.

The report also seeks “an assessment of support by state and non-state actors, including the government of Pakistan, for the Taliban between 2001 and 2020”, as well as the provision of sanctuary space, financial support, intelligence support, logistics and medical support, training, equipping, and tactical operation or strategic direction.

The legislation also requires “an assessment of support by state and non-state actors, including the government of Pakistan, for the September 2021 offensive of the Taliban against the Panjshir Valley and the Afghan resistance”.

The move is not only condemnable but also an admission of the follies of the Trump (Republican) and Biden (Democrat) administrations. However, it is not a bolt from a blue.

All assessments made in the past ever since 9/11 have directly or indirectly been targeting us for running with the hare and hunting with the hounds — hence the demands “to do more”, always suspecting us for being soft.

In this context, the book *Obama’s Wars* is an illustration of the American way of thinking, of which Biden was also a part. Based on the assessment of Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Bruce Riedel, the Pak-Afghan strategy was drawn. This quote from the book best describes their collective views: “Pakistan had to end its complex, schizophrenic relationship with terrorists in which they are ‘the patron and the victim and the safe haven all at the same time’.”

A textual analysis of discussions between the then US President, Obama, and his military and civil advisers could provide us identifying realities such as the US did not want to remain engaged militarily in Afghanistan for an indefinite period and instead wanted an early end to the conflict but wanted to enforce a solution on its own terms. The US saw Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of one problem needing a cohesive strategy.

There are many references to Pakistan in the mentioned book as a difficult and dangerous country to deal with. For instance, Obama presiding over a strategy review meeting opened the discussion with this observation: “Let’s start where our interests take us, which is really Pakistan, not Afghanistan.”

The three key goals of the strategy were identified by Obama as protecting the US homeland, allies and interests abroad; concern about Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and stability; and Pak-India relations.

Pakistan even then was perceived as a safe haven for al-Qaeda leaders and other militants by the US. There appears to be no marked difference in the thinking of Biden’s administration as compared to that of Obama’s. The US appreciated the importance of keeping the Pak-US alliance intact due to operational needs, but on many others, the strategic interests of both the countries did not converge.

Being overwhelmingly concerned with the US weariness towards war, Biden ultimately withdrew forces from Afghanistan, but all against his hopes the Taliban took over Kabul to the exclusion of others unlike what was agreed under the Doha Agreement.

Having no compulsion of operations in Afghanistan now, the Biden administration has embarked upon a renewed strategy under QUAD and AUKUS, focusing on the Indo-Pacific region in order to contain China. In this new development, Pakistan being contiguous to the Indian Ocean also appears to be under the US radar. The loud thinking of the hawks like John Bolton apprehends the possible creeping of radicalised elements into the power structure of Pakistan, which might endanger peace. The US Deputy Foreign Secretary, also not mincing words, said that the US was looking at Pakistan only in terms of what was happening in Afghanistan and not in a broader context of the relationship. The situation with these new developments is quite grave and poses new security challenges to us, despite a government of Taliban in Afghanistan. Therefore, diplomacy will remain a tight-rope walk for us, requiring cautious treading.

On our part, it is imperative to design a cohesive strategy with a focus on peaceful co-existence, dispelling the impression of having sympathy with radicals of any kind. Our overtures in this regard must be towards peace in the region, with a zero tolerance to radicalism.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 3rd, 2021.

Pakistan Stands Alone Despite Sacrifices By Senator Rehman Malik

In an attempt to examine why our sacrifices as a country are not recognised, we need to revisit incidences that have isolated us from the rest of the world. Countries that were previously friendly have now drifted away, opening up space for India to inflict damage upon us. For these avenues to be explored, we must go back to our roots.

Pakistan came into being in 1947 as a separate homeland for the residents of this part of India. The country was to be based on the notions of unity, faith and discipline. Unfortunately, this vision was forgotten and Pakistan was plunged into the self-interests of successive governments that also failed to provide basic amenities to the people. Our failures can be attributed to a few factors.

Pakistan lacks the provision of quality education as the education has not been formed progressively. The primary role of education has been neglected by all leaders and that has resulted in low developments in all fields of life. Unfortunately, education is awarded with the lowest budget, weakening the foundation of the education system from its core. The lack of policy implementation, defective examination system, poor physical facilities, lack of teacher quality, divide between rich and poor, lack of implementation of education policies, directionless education, low enrolment, high scale dropouts, political interference, an outdated curriculum, corruption, poor management and supervision, lack of research, and a lack of uniformity all prevent the provision of a basic standard of education. Pakistan has the world's second-highest number of out-of-school children, representing 44 per cent of the total population of 5-7 years' age group. The literacy rate of Pakistan is 59.13% since 2017 and has declined further, especially during the pandemic.

The second problem is corruption. Although it is a relative term, corruption is rampant in every segment of our society. The bureaucracy and politicians are hands in gloves in corrupt practices, be it financial or moral. Despite the fact that various institutions have been established to prevent it, it perseveres. One form of corruption in our society strongly rooted in bribery, a phenomenon that the NAB, FBR and FIA have been trying to stop for years. Every established

individual is guilty of partaking, whether it is a politician, bureaucrat, civil servant, or a member of the judicial system. Ineffective government bureaucracy together with high levels of corruption create significant barriers for progress in Pakistan. It even creates clear divisions of wealth and power, amplifying the divide between the rich and poor. Due to this trend, even those people who are living outside of Pakistan face criticism. The current government of Pakistan has taken several actions to overcome corruption and has reviewed the processes. Despite this, corruption is more rampant than it was in 2019 as the country now ranks 124 out of 180 countries global corruption list. We slipped four spots on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 2020 for the second year in a row.

Pakistan also supports a stark undemocratic culture. Ever since 1958, Pakistan had experienced four martial law governments and because of that, a democratic institution and attitude could not be developed. Each institution always remained under the fear of dismissal by the non-democratic forces. Evidently, political instability vastly damaged the development of democracy in Pakistan and tarnished its reputation in front of the international community. The performance of democracy has steadily decreased since it has been overtaken by ill-gotten money, blocking the way for the middle and educated class from rising up. Resultantly you see that the level of input in the assemblies by many officials amounts to little or nothing. This situation of horse trading and the lust for power is endangering democracy as leaders look forward to shift their loyalties not for the cause of the country but the artificially created winning impression for a party. In my personal view, the parliamentary system has crippled us.

When it comes to the rule of law, there is a serious lack of respect shown. The politicisation of the police and judicial system in the country denies justice to the people. The police looks towards the signals of their masters while the judiciary partners with the non-democratic forces. Both the institutions are equally responsible for the implementation of the rule of law, but they fail miserably. Now, the result is that people have lost confidence and trust in both the institutions and in some cases, people have resorted to violence for seeking justice by themselves. Even the judiciary has been releasing culprits regardless of the overwhelming evidence against them.

The National Security system of our country needs a permanent cure. The National Action Plan was injected in January 2015 with the view to improve our national security policies in order to crack down on terrorism. While it was

effective for the time being, now the failure of its implementation has brought it back to square one. Routine sit-ins, lockdowns and strikes by every other party after every 2 to 3 months have crippled the standard of national security and discipline in Pakistan. The civilian government must realise that inadequate national security is like a cancer which eats away the peace from society. Where there is no peace, there is no development and hence we need healthy, independent and powerful national security.

A strong economy of any country guarantees stability and prosperity. Pakistan's economy has never been as strong as it should have been. One of the reasons was that the subject of the economy was handled unprofessionally and, on an ad-hoc basis. The weak economy has thus rendered the country vulnerable to international vested interests. The country is hostage to not only the IMF but also the World Bank and is at the mercy of friendly countries for loans and grants. It is being forced to meet the demands of the IMF, in terms of raising taxes and increasing the prices of basic amenities in return for further loans. How long would we survive under these conditions? Finance is arguably the most important ministry in the federal government and fixing the economy is its primary job. The nation has not yet forgotten that even the man that the PTI had presented as its 'financial wizard', Asad Umar, had stepped down from the cabinet out of similar reasons right after returning from Washington after negotiating a deal with the IMF as the conditions were so unrealistic that he would rather choose to step down than to take the responsibility to fulfil demands.

The poor state of the economy attracts immense foreign debts as well. Our external debt servicing is currently over \$10 billion a year and will remain the same for the next two years. The above factors derailed us, and certain unwise decisions made us more vulnerable to the pressure of the vested international powers. The West successfully took advantage of our weaknesses and used those to serve their motives.

There is a long list of events as to how the anti-Pakistan strategy was chalked and implemented. It started with the murder of Liaqat Ali Khan, supporting the dictatorial regime of Ayub Khan, handing over power to Yahya Khan, the breaking of East Pakistan, toppling the government and the judicial killing of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, supporting the dictatorial regime of Gen Zia ul Haq, and lately the murder

of Benazir Bhutto. These are in fact sequences of a well-planned anti-Pakistan Strategy.

The planting of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan during the Afghan-Soviet war was one of the strategies of the West, especially the USA, to turn Pakistan into the turf for sectarian warfare, thus making it weaker and weaker. Without realising the consequence, Pakistan once again became a tool in the hands of the USA by joining the so-called war on terror started by the West.

We were once again used and instead of becoming an independent and thriving nation, we became a poster-boy for the USA by projecting its narratives internationally and locally. Throughout our participation in the war on terror and even after the abrupt withdrawal of the US, we have been trying to convince the global community that Pakistan was the actual victim of the war but still, it is doubted for its intentions. In fact, no country has accepted and appreciated the impacts of the war on Pakistan.

The question is why the world refuses to believe Pakistan and its narrative despite losing thousands of precious lives, hosting millions of Afghan refugees without any external assistance and at the expense of our economy. To me, there are other reasons for our failure to sell our narrative to the world. Firstly, the USA had designed the war on terror for its motives and not to benefit Pakistan. The role of Pakistan was predetermined in terms of weakening Pakistan and defaming it for supporting the Taliban. Secondly, Pakistan has failed to frame its narrative to tell the world as to why it has a soft corner for the Taliban. Thirdly, the lack of resources and professionalism within the Foreign Office is another factor that affected the narrative of Pakistan vis-à-vis the Taliban and Afghanistan. Their ability to effectively lobby for the interests of Pakistan have to be upgraded. They need to be given a clear vision and policy to defend our causes at the international level. Ironically, despite our sufferings, we are being dubbed as bad boys and India is being projected as good boys. We have proved the fact that India has been orchestrating terrorist activities in Pakistan.

It is important that the country 's economy should be sound and free of political polarisation. The main issue ahead of us is India, which is fully determined about its agenda to undermine each and every effort of stabilising Pakistan. We can fight our enemy only with a sound and stable system of governance in our country.

The views expressed above are solely mine & in the national interest and do not necessarily represent the views of my party.

The writer is former Interior Minister of Pakistan, Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Interior and Chairman of Think Tank “Global Eye”. He is the author of four books and his fifth book is about to get published. He can be reached at: rmalik1212@gmail.com, Twitter

@Senrehmanmalik

Political instability vastly damaged the development of democracy in Pakistan and tarnished its reputation in front of the international community.

Source: Published in The Nation

Focus on Political and Economic Realism By

Talat Masood

Our people are no strangers to experiencing chaotic and precarious conditions as the greater part of our history bears witness to it. But the country today, even by its own standards, is facing a potent combination of complex security and economic challenges not faced before. The irony is that in these circumstances the leadership, instead of trying to address these, is further aggravating it by their highly confrontational politics. This in turn is accentuating the existing uneasy relationship between the ruled and the ruling with serious consequences. The PDM leadership, sensing the rising discontent among people as they are finding it extremely difficult for the two ends to meet due to galloping inflation, is fully capitalising on it. Their anti-government drive, whether it will be able to remove the government or not, is certainly making the task of governance very arduous by bringing masses on the streets.

Moreover, the extreme hostility of India and changing character of the state that even our worst scenario projections would not have predicted gives another dimension to the threat. Instability in Afghanistan and the security situation getting more complex with IS-K terrorist attacks on the rise — its fallout will reverberate in Pakistan. A rather puzzling matter of concern is the deliberate snub by President Biden who is not making any verbal contact with PM Imran Khan. This is a clear message that for the US, Pakistan has only peripheral value. Although, it is highly doubtful that this assumption is credible and could be sustained over time. Nonetheless, it certainly has negative ramifications that would have an effect on the security and economy of the country and could influence relations with the West and push Pakistan more toward China.

Pakistan despite all its resources has regrettably failed to develop a functioning and thriving economy. Political and military leaders due to pressing compulsions or lack of foresight have never given the economy the priority and importance it deserves, although it plays a critical role in providing financial autonomy and is as a major element of national power.

It hurts national prestige and undermines freedom when we have to rely frequently on IMF and international donor agencies for economic support. And as

Dr Hafiz Pasha mentioned during the launch of his book that IMF policies are ruthless and its agenda of programmed reforms are extremely tough. The question-and-answer session was equally informative with participants making valid observations as how the country's power structure has adversely affected the economy.

The role of the security establishment in real estate business, the construction of public projects, has been growing. According to reliable estimates given in Dr Nazeer Mahar's recent book, the "combined value of the companies' assets was Rs443 billion in 2017, and growing 13 % per year.... The annual value of Frontier Works Organization (FWO) is 230 billion". Several reputed economists of our country have been persistent in drawing attention on the state of the national economy and suggesting viable options for improving it. Overall inefficiencies and lack of sensitivity for the people's wellbeing are contributing factors for the present state of the economy. It is a paradox that Pakistan being a nuclear power and the second most populous Muslim country in the world has failed to establish economic independence.

It is crucial is that the leadership gives high priority to improving the economy. Ever since the inception of Pakistan, successive governments have relied heavily on foreign assistance to keep the economy afloat. Initially, in the first decade of its existence the country had to virtually start from scratch and was burdened with such enormous security and financial challenges that it had perforce to rely on foreign assistance. Settling millions of refugees, establishing a functional government infrastructure and facing an extremely hostile India required maintaining a highly professional military. All these developments placed additional burden on our economy. As India's threat was real, Pakistan leaders found it expedient to be a part of the US-led Western security alliances — Cento, SEATO and Bagdad Pact. Later in the eighties, Pakistan played a key role in facilitating the US in supporting the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation. The alliance came at a heavy cost as it invited the hostility of the erstwhile Soviet Union. But the redeeming feature was that it kept the US and the international donor agencies supporting us and providing substantive financial assistance which kept the country afloat. These measures, however, were no substitute for building a self-sustaining economy. In essence those were compulsions of the time that later became a national habit. There are limits to how much a nation can leverage itself on the premise of its geo-strategic position, especially in a changing global dynamic. The exponential development of technology has given

rise to weapon systems that have transformed many aspects of warfare and reduced reliance on bases.

There were expectations that the PTI government will give high priority to the economy, instead its leadership has been harking on the past failures of political opponents as the centerpiece of its strategy. What is of concern is that the real per capita income in the last three years has fallen in real terms and the government is finding it difficult to pay back the loans. The loss-making state enterprises continue to bleed heavily and the government has not been able to privatise these due to political expediency. Human development has been another weak area of civilian and military governments with few exceptions.

By now the PTI leadership must have realised that criticism of past governments only goes that far, adds to people's frustrations and is a weak substitute for good governance. The manipulations and wrongdoings in the recent Daska bye-elections have soiled the party's image and claims of standing on the moral high ground.

The image that the PTI has initially been projecting of being a party of change and a standard bearer of proclivity, that description too does not seem to hold.

Hopefully, the leadership would realise the overriding necessity of focusing on creating a self-sustaining economy and developing a functional political culture.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 10th, 2021.

China's Foreign Policy Towards Pakistan and India By Dr Muhammad Akram Zaheer

Since the late 20th century, China has shifted her policy from isolation and separation from the international community and now is on the way to becoming the major economic power of the world. The Chinese leadership has formulated more attractive, pragmatic and flexible policies for global affairs and issues. With economic growth, China is widening and deepening its quest for energy resources and expanding its investment, market and political influence. It is also projecting her soft power vigorously and peacefully by promoting culture, sports, education, tourism and other exchanges. The Chinese believe in the emergence of a peaceful great power as once. Professor of international relations Yan Xuetong said, China is the second most powerful state in the world.

A rapid change in the domestic situations of countries and in the international system has been followed by the change of their, perceptions, priorities, foreign policies and interests. That's why the modern dynamics of foreign policies are extending their activities into many spheres of the international system to increase influence. The quest for the achievement of national interests allows countries to continue work effectively on their potential, inherent to make useful policy.

In the past, Chinese diplomacy was often employed to pursue goals of unbalanced interests. Now the world has dramatically changed since after the Cold war and China is in the position to play a constructive role in the international system. China was allied to the USSR and viewed the USA as its principal enemy during the 1950s. On the other hand, Washington sought an anti-communist alliance with Pakistan as well as close relations with India. After the 1965 Indo-Pak war, US and Indian relations became weaker due to Washington's limited sale of weapons to India. In 1970s, India moved closer to the USSR while China grew closer to Islamabad because India's of complicated strategic position. Then China inclined towards the USA in quest of its export market and as a counterbalance to the USSR.

After the USSR's collapse, a peaceful environment favued China and a shift came in her policy towards south Asia. Now, Beijing was seeking political and

economic bilateral ties with the regional countries, particularly positive developments in the process of Sino-India rapprochement. This shift did not favour Pakistan and posed negative consequences on the traditional Pak-China relationship. The impact of the foreign policy shift gave this impression during the Pak-India crisis over Kashmir in 1989-90 when Beijing did not support a resolution on Kashmir in the United Nations. It remained neutral and calm, emphasizing on both parties to solve the issue by dialogue. Contrarily, the Cold-war Chinese policy towards Pakistan was supportive against India.

During the 1990s, China has been advising both Pakistan and India to solve their problems through dialogue. In 1996, President Jiang Zemin visited Pakistan and in his speech to the Senate, he urged Pakistan to develop cooperative relations with India and put thorny issues aside. Pakistan should make trade and economic relations to lessen the hostility. During the Kargil crisis China-India rapprochement had entered the mature phase. This time again, China adopted a neutral policy and emphasized holding talks and solving the issue through negotiations.

Pakistan was seeking active support on the issues of Kashmir and Kargil, but the Chinese position was unchanged. During the visit of the Pakistani Foreign Minister to China in 1999, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said the international community has great concerns about the South Asian situation and Pakistan should remain cool and exercise self-control. It was a warning to Pakistan that China would not support it militarily, and Pakistan should get out from Kargil and settle the crisis by dialogue.

China and India have agreed to expand their cooperation on multiple levels to ensure peace on their borders. However, India and Pakistan are challenging each other on the issue of Kashmir and both the countries had fought four wars in the past. On the issue of Kashmir, Chinese policy will have significant implications for the China-India-Pakistan relationship and will test China's foreign policy towards Pakistan and India.

After the cold war, India abandoned the Soviet model and looked for economic reforms. Therefore, India remained no longer allied so closely to Moscow and became less of a danger to China. Now the need of Islamabad for Beijing was narrowed to counterbalance Delhi and Moscow, but was concerned at the Delhi-Washington closeness. China wants to prevent India joining the USA to counter her and the USA looks to India to counterbalance China. This situation is very

difficult for China to sustain and maintain the balance and demonstrate her ability in the region of nuclear powers.

The incident of 9/11 brought regional and international developments and new adjustments in foreign policy for China. This led to a diplomatic standoff between Pakistan and India. Almost for a year, the military forces of both sides stood eyeball to eyeball. The terrorist attack on Indian Parliament and the Srinagar incident inflamed insecurity and instability in the region. Beijing has concerns about Pak-India tension and it played a proactive role at the diplomatic level to diffuse tension. China also activated SCO and other forums to dissipate tension between Islamabad and New Delhi.

Soon after 9/11, the USA declared a global war against terrorism and China was discomfited and had many internal and external concerns. It warned the USA that counter-terrorism should not be used to practise hegemony. Although the war was against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, China also managed the worsened situation of her troubled province of Xinjiang, and was unsettled by the presence of US forces near her border. China believed that Washington would create instability in the region and might have new political designs. The region, particularly Central Asia, was more attractive to China due to its energy resources and Washington's political and military involvement in the region worried China.

Washington was increasing pressure on Islamabad to get Pakistani support for the war on terror in Afghanistan after 9/11. On the other hand, China had concerns of the expanding Delhi-Washington strategic cooperation.

India and the USA were considering China as a common rival of both and were thinking to limit the rise of China. Washington made efforts to diffuse the crisis between Pakistan and India by a balancing posture during this period. China also maintained a balanced position towards Pakistan and India post 9/11. Another worry for China was the Indian move towards Japan and Vietnam, with whom Chinese relations remained tense.

The past cooperation in political, economics, security and diplomatic issues and bilateral ties produced Chinese \$62 billion investment in Pakistan through CPEC. China has provided support to Pakistan in the UNSC regularly. China has assisted Pakistan to improve security and defence capability by the joint venture

of the JF-17 Thunder in 2003. The deteriorating relationship of Islamabad and Washington provide China motivation and impetus to improve relations.

On the other hand, China and India are two natural strategic rivals with large populations in the region. A sense of competition between the two is very high. China has engaged Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Maldives, which was considered in the area of Indian influence. China tried to build a road in Bhutan in the Doklam area, which is a source of tension for India. It seemed that China was occupying the strategic territory, which was very necessary for Indian security. In addition, India thinks that Pakistan is serving Chinese interests by forcing her to fight wars, reducing the Indian ability to counter the Chinese rise.

However, the leadership of both China and India has recognized the need of peace and cooperation to ease the tension. They met in the Wuhan summit in April 2018 and agreed to expand economic relations. China seems a major beneficiary of China-India economic relations. The importance of this partnership may not be worsening China-Pakistan relations. The example of the China and Pakistan cooperation is seen when Beijing put its weight behind Islamabad and forced a discussion in the UNSC on India's latest reconfiguration of Kashmir.

As its economic power grows, China has its own paradigm of development and new ways of interaction with regional and global powers on a win-win basis. Being the neighbour of China, Pakistan has the privilege to achieve investment and trade. The frequent exchange visits by the leadership of both have reinforced mutual trust and cooperation. On the other hand, China and India have agreed to expand their cooperation on multiple levels to ensure peace on their borders. However, India and Pakistan are challenging each other on the issue of Kashmir and both the countries had fought four wars in the past. On the issue of Kashmir, Chinese policy will have significant implications for the China-India-Pakistan relationship and will test China's foreign policy towards Pakistan and India.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

TAPI Gas Pipeline Project Brings New Hope

By Pathik Hasan

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline is a regional connectivity project for supplying gas to fulfil the public demand from Turkmenistan to India's Fajilka (Punjab).

It a great regional initiative proposed by ADB and taken by four regional countries. The TAPI gas pipeline seems to a bridge between South Asia and Central Asia.

The regional connectivity gas pipeline will supply natural gas from the Turkmenistan's Galkynysh Gas Field through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then to India.

Construction on the project in Turkmenistan was inaugurated to construct the gas pipeline on 13 December 2015, work on the Afghan section began in February 2018, and work on the Pakistani section was planned to commence in December 2018.

The TAPI pipeline is expected to carry 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. The 1,814-kilometer gas pipeline stretches from Galkynesh, the world's second-largest gas field, to the Indian city of Fazilka, near the Pakistan border. Work on the TAPI project in Afghanistan began in February 2016. The 617 km gas pipeline was planned to pass through Afghanistan.

But due to internal situation, security in Afghanistan and India-Pakistan tension as well as regional issues the connectivity project wasn't implemented. There was a speculation whether the connectivity project will be completed finally at all. Taliban's takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021 increased the speculation.

Now the speculation is over. The region is going to see the implementation of the connectivity project that may bring prosperity for the region.

Work on Afghanistan's part of the TAPI gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and India via Pakistan is about to begin soon.

Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, has said that work on Afghanistan's part of the TAPI gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan-Pakistan India will resume soon.

He made the remarks at a news conference after a meeting with Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov in Kabul on 31 October 2021.

Muttaqi said the two sides discussed strengthening political and economic ties during the Turkmen foreign minister's visit.

"Important issues like TAPI, rail connectivity and electricity have been discussed," he said. We have discussed strengthening the projects that have already started.

Pakistan is very interested to complete the project. Afghanistan, Pakistan including India would benefit from the gas pipeline connectivity project. Afghanistan's interim government has already given the green signal to complete the project.

Basically, this gas project would fulfil the demand of energy, electricity and gas in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The project was expected to create 2,000 new employment opportunities.

Implementation of the TAPI gas pipeline project was beneficial for the entire region, with Afghanistan alone to get \$1 billion as transit fee and royalty.

Pakistan will be the main customer of Turkmen gas. Pakistan has long suffered from energy shortages that affect families and businesses alike. Load shedding is a very common term in Pakistan now.

That is why the supply of gas and electricity has become an integral part of the election manifestos of political parties.

The project will bring clean fuel to the growing economies of India. It will provide energy-hungry India gas to run its power plants.

TAPI's uninterrupted gas flow will be extremely important for India's energy sector. There is energy and gas crisis in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

This could help to fulfil the growing need of the people. India, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been facing energy crisis. TAPI has the potential to solve the energy woes of Pakistan and India.

The pipeline is expected to facilitate a unique level of trade and cooperation across the region, as well as support peace and security between the four countries. More than 1.5 billion people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are expected to benefit from the long-term energy security provided by the project.

Also, the project is expected to increase Turkmenistan's revenue through gas sales. Afghanistan and Pakistan will also benefit from transit fees.

Although Taliban's Kabul takeover on August 15, 2021 has changed the geopolitics in the region, there are some issues where all regional countries can work together for ensuring the mutual interest in the region.

Although India was an active stakeholder in this project, now India's position in this regard is not clear.

But India should remain in this project for its own interest. There might have some bilateral problems in India-Pakistan, but that is not issue. All regional States including India and Pakistan can work closely in the sector of trade and connectivity for ensuring the common greater interest.

If this gas project can be extended to Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan in the near future, all regional actors would benefit from the connectivity project. It is true that resumption of TAPI pipeline project in Afghanistan brings a new hope for the region.

—The writer is contributing columnist, based in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Source: Published in Pak Obsever

Afghanistan: Pak-China convergence & the West By Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi

GIVEN the ongoing tussle of power interests in Afghanistan, the truth is that the Western powers and India are displeased with Pak-China policy congruity in Afghanistan.

In terms of foreign relations, China and Pakistan form a congruity of policymaking as vindicated by the fact that after Islamabad's refusal to attend an India — sponsored conference on Afghanistan, Beijing had also refused to participate in it.

If Beijing pursues its economic interests in Afghanistan, Islamabad is defending its security interests there.

On 02 November, Pakistan National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf, while addressing a press conference in Islamabad along with the Uzbekistan NSA, said: "I will not go, a spoiler can't be a peacemaker," in response to a question on whether Islamabad would attend India's meeting. Yusuf said: "I think the region's obstacles are in front of you, there is no need for debate on this.

On one hand is India... unfortunately (because of) the government's behaviour and ideology there, I don't see how this (peace) process will move forward — not just for Pakistan but the region." "The world has unfortunately kept its eyes closed and isn't talking to India as it should," he said.

Many strategists in the Western and Indian media have linked the Afghan Taliban's seizure of power with the cascade of geopolitical dynamism characterizing China-US relations, China-India relations and India-Pakistan relations.

They argue that the successful seizure of power by the Afghan Taliban is a success of China and Pakistan, but a strategic failure of the US, the West and India.

The reason is very simple that why they have this faulty interpretation is mainly their geopolitical-competition thinking and zero-sum game thinking.

As for the Chinese role in the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, India has been demonstrating a devil's advocacy by projecting that Beijing is eyeing the untapped mineral resources in Afghanistan, which are estimated to have a value of \$1 to \$3 trillion.

From the Indian perspective, with the change of government in Afghanistan (the Taliban take over), New Delhi may usher in new era of its external relations policy where the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan is likely to accelerate current trends in India's relations with the United States, China, and Russia: greater cooperation with Washington, deeper conflicts with Beijing and wider fissures in the traditional strategic partnership with Moscow.

Sadly, there has been a maligned western agenda to see the Pak-Afghan partnership via jaundiced eye, as a recent report published by the USIP says, "That conflict is almost certain to intensify after the US and international forces withdraw, battlefield developments will take centre stage.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship is likely to further deteriorate, and vitriol on both sides could foreclose on any remaining opportunities to reach a negotiated settlement.

Bilateral ties will likewise influence security, political, and economic dynamics in the medium to long-term, either after the conflict reaches a stalemate or after a new government takes shape."

That said, it appears no secret to the international community, the role India has been mischievously playing in Afghanistan is nothing but a conspiracy beyond conspiracy to destabilize Pakistan from Afghan soil.

The seeds of dissension and trust deficit sown by the Indian Administration have severely damaged the fabric of diplomatic understanding between Islamabad and New Delhi. If India has to play a role in Afghanistan, it is unlikely to play a positive one.

India is likely to use its intelligence agencies and some forces cultivated in Afghanistan and its surrounding areas in the past more than 20 years to undermine and disrupt the stability of Afghanistan. This is unfavourable to Afghanistan and its close neighbours, including China and Pakistan.

Key interests of China and Pakistan in Afghanistan, and their mutual cooperation to pursue them.

It identifies security, energy, connectivity and geopolitics as China's main interests. Get recognition of the Durand Line as an international border with Afghanistan, prevention of 'hostile elements' from using Afghan territory and access to the CARs as those of Pakistan's motives.

Both sides—China and Pakistan cooperated with each other on Afghanistan under the umbrella of their strategic partnership.

Islamabad helped in establishing initial Taliban-China contacts and persuaded the Taliban for negotiations with the USA and Kabul authorities.

Beijing pragmatically supported Islamabad's Afghan policy and mediated between Islamabad–Kabul, and Taliban–Kabul negotiations.

China and Pakistan backed their diplomacy with economic assistance and extended CPEC and BRI to Afghanistan.

Amidst various challenges, thus far Sino-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan has benefited to their mutual interests and contributed to the peace process. Afghanistan has emerged as a new chapter of their relationship.

Beijing's major interest in securing economic gains can be achieved by using Afghanistan's position as a regional connector in either the Belt and Road Initiative or China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

In addition, since 2007 China has been seeking ways to extract Afghanistan's vast mineral wealth, which requires security and transportation infrastructure.

None of this is possible without a stable Afghanistan, so China is still assessing the political landscape in Afghanistan and what it could gain from a peace-establishing future there.

As for the US failures and Washington's perceived role in Afghanistan, some of the western thinkers have a variety of appraisals: Charles Kupchan of

Georgetown University, says that Biden was right to pull the plug on the Afghan government, and that the entire Western strategy was flawed from the outset, insofar as the goal was to establish a unitary, centralized state..

More radically, Columbia University's Jeffrey D. Sachs sees in Afghanistan a longstanding pattern of dubious US military interventions in developing countries, arguing that American priorities once again betrayed policymakers' contempt for the local population.

Needless to say, from the very beginning, the US- Afghan policy—a depiction of unpragmatic adhocism lacked vision—which badly sponsored political and economic ostracism of the Afghans.

A feeling of resentment has been strongly developed in the local Afghans about the West as they think that their major motive has been to impose their political or security agenda in the region.

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Source: Published in pak obsever

What does AUKUS Mean for India and Pakistan? By Sohail Ahmad Azmie

Living the legacy of the Cold War and treading the block-centric constructs, the idea of a “security dialogue” was mooted by the Japanese prime minister in 2007. In 2017, the US, India, Australia and Japan agreed to formally constitute the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QSD, also called the QUAD. Though it was meant for “peace and security in the Indo-Pacific,” it had all anti-China markers. By 2021, the QUAD claimed to realize a “free and open Indo-Pacific” and “rules-based maritime order in East and South China Seas.” This was a clear reference to conflict with the Chinese maritime claims, particularly in the South China Sea. Several meetings had been held under the auspices of QUAD that apparently had been ineffective in conveying strategic messaging to China. Realizing the rise of the Chinese economy and strengthening of its military, the US felt compelled to figure something else. Hence, the emergence of AUKUS. This September, the US, the UK and Australia decided to constitute a new security alliance, awkwardly named as AUKUS, i.e., a security architecture consisting of Australia, the UK and the US. AUKUS kicked off on a controversial footing as the first post-AUKUS inauguration act came from Australia that scrapped the submarine deal with France.

The US authorized as part of AUKUS to “sell” nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN) to Australia; possibly carrying Tomahawk cruise missiles. India was entirely ignored in the arrangement while France was asked to “pack up the submarine deal” from Australia. AUKUS reflects, in many ways, the clear pointers of the Cold War “containment psyche,” as it gives a message to China to “remain” within the South China Sea or to “abandon the maritime claims” on Paracel and Spratly Islands. AUKUS is expected to increase Sino-US rivalry and may result in straining regional stability. The proliferation of nuclear submarines and their regular patrols would force China to deploy its submarines to maintain the strategic balance, ushering into a New Cold War. So far, China has shown a visible tilt towards trade and commerce, as the figures of trade continue to rise between China and several countries around the world, especially India (\$ 100 Billion) and Australia (\$ 245 Billion).

AUKUS reflects the clear pointers of the Cold War “containment psyche,” as it gives a message to China to “remain” within the South China Sea.

At such time, bringing in AUKUS just means hitting the Chinese economy, compelling it to reduce trade or redirecting financial efforts to an arms race. India, though not a direct partner of AUKUS, is likely to take leverage under QUAD and may pursue the US for the transfer of nuclear submarine technology. On other hand, as Yogdesh Joshi at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute notes, India would have greater “strategic autonomy” after being left out of AUKUS, which could mean the application of military options at sea against China or Pakistan. Joshi suggests the US change of focus from “power of norms” to “norms of power” is a sordid disregard to NPT and other nuclear proliferation regimes. Contrary to NPT 1968 and IAEA statutes, AUKUS enables nuclear-armed states to divert fissile material away from the IAEA inspection if it is used for peaceful pursuits, including submarine propulsion. The naval reactor (used onboard the submarines) is a loophole to the NPT and IAEA safeguards whereby a Non-Nuclear Weapons State (NNWS) could divert materials from naval reactors and potentially use that material for weapons production. The NPT does not prohibit NNWS from non-explosive military uses of nuclear material and obviously, the naval reactor is an example. This ‘loophole’ in the NPT would be greatly exploited by AUKUS for a long time to come. The NPT-loophole would embolden India to seek nuclear technology as it would claim to ‘contain China’ in the greater Indian Ocean, particularly in the Arabian Sea. This proposition could convince Washington to extend the US SSN technology to India for the pursuance of its “counter-China” design. Supporting India to become a reckonable threat to China will create multiple threat centres making it difficult for China to concentrate on all, thereby losing the strategic advantage of being a “regional player.” This is exactly what the US did to the erstwhile Soviet Union during the Cold War by creating NATO and installing ICBMs in Japan and Turkey. Multiple threat foci divided the USSR’s focus and resulted in an arms race that wrecked the Russian economy paving way for the disintegration of the socialist states.

The flipside of AUKUS could provide an opportunity for both France and India to get closer and may begin their bilateral nuclear technology transfer program. Since the SSN sale to Australia has unmasked the NPT-loophole, it may not stop France and India from getting into this kind of arrangement easing the nuclear technology transfer. In the Nuclear Supplier Group’s Vienna meeting in 2008,

India was granted a waiver to undertake nuclear trade without being subjected to IAEA's safeguards. AUKUS would, indirectly, legitimize Indian plans to acquire fissile material and other sensitive technology making it possible for India to upgrade its nuclear warfighting capability. In turn, this will help start an irretrievable arms race in the region. Changing the situation in both Indian and the Indo-Pacific leaves Pakistan with not many options but to strengthen its Sea-based deterrence capability, this could ONLY come from a nuclear-powered submarine. India becoming an operator of "ballistic missile carrying nuclear-powered submarine" or in short SSBN, and with two operational aircraft carriers means a pronounced escalation in coercion against Pakistan, in about two to three years from now. This strategic reality cannot be long ignored. Pakistan may not have "equal punch" but it must have an "equivalent punch" to maintain strategic parity in and around the Arabian Sea. Fragile military equilibrium incentivizes India to adopt aggression and may choose a morphed form of "surgical strike" to establish a newer kind of "New Normal" as it gets its nuclear submarines to sea.

The writer is an independent researcher and tweets at @SohailAzmie.

Source: Published in Daily Times

Reforms and Institution Building By Mohsin Saleem Ullah

The forefathers of Pakistan envisioned a country that could provide an environment free from corruption, inequality, injustice, economic grievances and other evils that might affect the governance of a newly born state. Pakistan inherited limited financial resources at the time of independence, however, it succeeded in establishing well-functioning executive departments in a strong military that worked independently in its realm. With time, as the provinces expanded geographically and new administrative units were defined, the provincial governments began experiencing unprecedented political, security, and socio-economic issues which called for federal intervention. Hence, it created a political rift amongst the different organs of the state, owing to their undefined constitutional limits.

The World Bank has defined good governance as, “how power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. By this definition, we can infer that the presence of the rule of law, safeguard of human rights and the existence of an honest and efficient government, accountability, transparency, predictability and openness are the indicators of the good governance found in developed states.

Effective presentation of narrative imperative to win modern era wars: Fawad
However, the situation is to the contrary in Pakistan, which is amongst the overly legislated countries but has an ineffective implementation of its laws. Every year hundreds of cases of rape, domestic violence and honour killing are reported across the country, but no quick remedy is provided to the victim’s family, as was evident in the Noor Mukkadam case. Despite having stringent laws with punitive measures, the victims fail to get speedy justice, owing to a lengthy and slow judicial process because of a high volume of backlog that has been lingering in courts for decades. Pakistan is a pioneer of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, but human rights abuses are rampant in the Balochistan region, especially the violent killing of the ethnic-religious minority group of Shia Hazara community which has been targeted by religious fanatics for decades. No effort is made at the national level to promote inclusiveness to ensure their political

participation, ameliorate socio-economic conditions by providing them economic opportunities and help elevate their social standard through public awareness campaigns. Unfortunately, Pakistan's unsatisfactory performance in the situation, and being inattentive to its present crisis have raised questions over its governance issues.

Good governance entails the participation of public, and political stakeholders in a broad range of activities, and in policy formulation through which people can express their opinion in favour or against any action of the government. Equity and inclusion of all people in a society, regardless of their gender, caste, creed, sects, and religious affiliation provides an equal opportunity to all members of society. It's a democratic way of empowering citizens to have their voice in government-owned initiatives including an opportunity for them to choose a leader of their choice through voting, which becomes controversial each year due to a lack of transparency.

For Pakistan to mitigate the governance crisis, there is a dire need to fix fundamental issues in its democratic system. A fully empowered local government is only possible through relegating provincial administrative powers to local government and re-distributing them to different administrative levels. This would enhance working coordination among different hierarchies and preclude from consolidating power on one hand, and ameliorate the efficiency of the government, increase its response time for taking quick action, and facilitate public access to information. Corrupt officials, politicians, and businessmen are found escaping through the accountability process in Pakistan, despite its own National Accountability Bureau. Pakistan's executive, since its independence has had strained relations with the military, owing to past regimes interference in governing the country; however, these relations need to be based on harmony, mutual interests and for the betterment of Pakistan and its people, which is only possible by improving coordination and developing respect for each other's domain. Education is the backbone of a country—to elevate its literacy level, which serves as a medium to spread awareness and enlighten members of society. For a society to eradicate corruption, social vices, and other malpractices, a government must dispense quality education to its citizens. Besides its numerous benefits, another key importance of education is its role in creating a productive workforce of a country that is required to support Pakistan's dwindling economy.

Good governance is achievable, and its crisis is avoidable by following good indicators and formulating policies that are aimed for resolving issues and addressing the growing concerns of all stakeholders.

Source: Published in The Nation

Structure of Bureaucracy By Iftikhar Ahmad

We can have no effective understanding of public administration unless we keep in mind the wide range of considerations relevant to the administrator's behaviour. Each administrative situation is unique, suggesting an innovative and creative approach, and the importance of analytical skills to seek solutions appropriate to ever-changing scenarios. Effective bureaucracy immediately responds to the issues, mainly of performance. Good governance means performance and upgrading the equality of administration.

Input-output analysis is a good guide to determine the direction of government programs to keep track of what actually happens to the people they are serving. If that is built in from the beginning, it becomes easy to dispense with a lot of red tapes. The results-oriented government needs to focus on funding outcomes, not inputs. Politicians and bureaucrats have to be clear about the mission, objectives and policy guidelines. Performance measures are essential to bringing quality, competition and cost reduction.

The traditional bureaucratic approach has to be replaced by a new system. Studies show that government departments pay little attention to outcomes. It does not matter how well the children do in one school versus another, or how many poor people get off welfare into stable jobs, or how much the crime rate falls or how secure the public feels.

Entrepreneurial governments seek to change these rewards and incentives. Public enterprises know that when institutions are funded according to inputs, they have little reason to strive for better performance. Entrepreneurial institutions avoid creating an environment or work culture that helps employees assiduously protect their jobs and build their empires, pursuing large budgets, large staff and more authority. But when they are funded according to outcomes, they become obsessive about performance. Because they do not measure results, bureaucratic governments rarely achieve them.

Public policy and governance are the prime movers of development and the true characteristics of society.

Current bureaucratic structures are confronted with basic and irreversible changes. New problems require more organisational structures in which creativity, flexibility and efficiency are underlined and the client or the audience essentially constitutes one of the final and most important orientations. Service orientation has to be focused on the rule of the situation. And that how the organizational culture is being changed

If the substantive decisions, i.e. decisions on programme, are arrived at by the wise and informed use of the resources of administration and by an intelligent appreciation of the political environment, they are far more likely to be sound than if they are arrived at in hit-or-miss or doctrinaire fashion. A realisation of the nature of public administration leads to a clarification of objectives and a more sophisticated approach to those objectives amid pressures generated by society. For both professional students and lay citizens who seek to understand why government officials behave as they do and to learn how to judge their decisions, the same general conclusions apply.

People complain about the government. Some question its very justification for being. We match it against an ideal. We look to government officials for qualities that we do not forcefully demand of others, including those with whom the government does important business. All we can and do ask public administrators is that they use foresight, decency and intelligence in reaching their decisions. Decisions need to be in line with public policy and the norms of good governance.

For public enterprises, the government itself is accountable and has to make sure that public enterprises are operated effectively and efficiently in line with public policy, principles of good governance and innovative techniques and methods. The trend should be toward reinventing and re-engineering rather than privatisation. The government has to make sure that there are no contradictions within and between public policy. An enabling culture has to be created to give meaning to public policy and the system of governance with strong merit orientation, capacity building and the will to serve the people to satisfy their needs.

Public policy and governance are the prime movers of development in various sectors of the economy and the characteristics of society. An integrated approach is needed to make the best use of resources and to improve the

delivery systems to the satisfaction of the people. Effective and efficient service delivery depends on the organisation of civil services in a country, particularly on training policies that help in capacity-building and morale-boosting. Rationalising the system of recruitment, career and training, and enlightening and proper orientation of politicians are all necessary to overcome problems of governance that often crop up because of lack of merit orientation, personal idiosyncrasies and corruption. There has to be a proper system to check and prevent distasteful behaviours of politicians as well as civil servants whose indifference is often detrimental and frustrating for their junior colleagues.

The writer is former Director (National Institute of Public Administration); a political analyst; a public policy expert and a published author.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Another Bailout Package From Saudi Arabia **By Kamran Yousaf**

Prime Minister Imran Khan recently undertook a visit to Saudi Arabia to attend “Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) Summit” at the invitation of Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. But to the surprise of many, the Prime Minister returned from Riyadh with yet another financial bailout package. Saudi Arabia immediately deposited \$3 billion in the State Bank of Pakistan to shore up Pakistan’s foreign reserves against the backdrop of rising international commodity prices. Riyadh would also provide \$1.2 billion oil on deferred payment for a year.

This new support was unexpected given that the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in recent years has been marred by differences on certain issues. Earlier this year, Pakistan had rather returned \$3 billion to Saudi Arabia even though in the past, such lending had either rolled over or converted into a grant. But such was the nature of the hiccup in ties that Pakistan had to do the unthinkable. The reason for apparent friction stemmed from differences on certain issues including Pakistan’s move to seek closer ties with countries such as Iran, Turkey and Malaysia, something that did not go down well with the Saudi rulers. Pakistan was also upset with Saudi Arabia not supporting it on the Kashmir dispute with India. Then there was also thought to be pressure on Pakistan to rethink its stance towards Israel. Against this backdrop it is natural to ask what has prompted Saudi Arabia to extend a helping hand at this juncture and if Pakistan has offered anything in return.

When Prime Minister Imran Khan took charge in August 2018, the US and Saudi Arabia had close ties while tensions were running high between Iran and Saudi Arabia. But since President Joe Biden has taken over, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US has gone sour. Biden decided not to speak to MBS while he also withdrew support for the Yemen war. This left Saudi Arabia in a serious situation as it looked for other options. While the Biden administration

sought to revive the nuclear deal with Iran, Riyadh also began talks with Tehran to seek rapprochement. The Saudi Foreign minister confirmed that the two countries had been talking to each other. Their officials had a fourth meeting on September 21 and both sides reported progress in them. The improved Saudi-Iran ties means that Pakistan won't be facing the similar pressure to pick sides as it faced in the past. MBS is now seeking to strengthen ties with China, the main US rival. On October 17, the Chinese and Saudi Foreign Ministers spoke to each other on the phone. The statement issued by the Chinese foreign minister was quite telling. It said that the Chinese foreign minister told his Saudi counterpart that China has "always given priority" to its relations with Saudi Arabia in its diplomacy in the Middle East. The Saudi foreign minister responded by suggesting that Saudi Arabia regards "China as a truly credible strategic partner."

Similarly, the Saudi-Russia ties have also seen improvement signaling another shift. It is also important to note that while Saudi Arabia announced the financial bailout package, Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Chinese President had a rare telephonic conversation. It is believed that the Prime Minister took the Chinese leader into confidence about the Saudi assistance. In the past, Saudi assistance was thought to be aimed at persuading Pakistan to stay away from China at the behest of the US. But this time it seems that is not the case. Therefore, it appears that Saudi Arabia has extended the assistance to Pakistan out of its own strategic compulsions.

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

The Resumption of the IMF Deal By Kanwar

M Dilshad

The resumption of the IMF deal is crucial for Pakistan to sustain its external sector in the short to medium term since the growing trade gap is fuelling the current account deficit and bringing the already meagre foreign exchange reserves under massive stress.

But it is bad news for ordinary people. There's no telling how the talks with the IMF are going but it is easy enough to see that they are not progressing smoothly.

The gap between what government says and what the people are going through cannot increase beyond a certain point. When that point comes can be different from one country to the next depending on various things.

It would be a terrible mistake for the government to underestimate the strength of the wave that is about to hit them in the coming months. In this financial situation people of Pakistan are very much worried about the future of CPEC.

There are some issues prevailing in various CPEC and non-CPEC projects. One of the major issues is the capacity payments liable to be paid by the government to the Chinese companies.

And the government wants companies to receive payments in instalments since it's not possible to clear these payments fully.

The government is convincing Chinese companies engaged in power projects to receive capacity payments in instalments instead of full amount as it would be convenient for it to clear pending dues.

It is reality that there are some issues that also include the ones related to scrutiny of Chinese. At some projects the work is carried out slowly while some were underway fast.

The government is heading in a right direction to resolve all issues including the capacity payments amicably as it has succeeded in developing consensus with Chinese in this regard.

There is the project worth Us dollars 6.8 billion already approved by the government under CPEC.

Chinese point of view is that the cost estimation for the project is not according to its components. They say it should be nearly 8 billion dollars or so. Pakistan and Chinese are working on this.

As for as the Dasu Hyddro power project is concerned where the Chinese stopped work due to killing of nine Chinese engineers in a terrorist attack a couple of months ago, the Prime Minister and Army establishment are supervising this security issue very keenly.

—The writer is former Federal Secretary Election Commission of Pakistan and currently Chairman National Democratic Foundation.

Source: Published in Pak Obsever

Economic Outlook By Dr Khaqan Hassan

Najeeb

We were beginning to enjoy a welcome party-like atmosphere, created by slight economic recovery and promising improvement in some high-frequency domestic demand indicators. However, rising external deficits and inflation have somewhat overshadowed this premature jubilation.

Borrowing loans and deferring energy payments to prop up reserves, however necessary in the eyes of policymakers, as a signal to calm disruption in the market is not a financially viable option as in the end, these liabilities need to be paid back with interest.

In the immediate, what we need is a sharper focus on undertaking appropriate policy calibration to ensure resilience in economic pickup, keep inflation expectations anchored and curtail the continuous rise in the trade and current account deficits.

The economy remains hostage to unsustainable episodic growth – a predicament we must recognise and think wisely about to overcome. Pakistan can no longer afford to not shift from its fire-fighting economic management to doing seismic structural changes. This alone is the way to national economic prosperity – anything short will keep us in the precarious condition of perpetual boom and bust cycles, hurting the nation. We are in a phase where the risk of doing too-little-too-slow far exceeds the risk of doing too-much-too-fast.

We can re-imagine the way we introduce policy and structural reforms. Economic reforms anchored in the best international practices or some standard indices of competitiveness have not worked so far. Such an approach has distorted our priorities, at times laying an impossibly-difficult-to-implement reform agenda.

We must be able to define the objectives of such reforms and determine a path to achieve them in our given context. In this way, we don't have to rely on outside help, but follow a more endogenous stance.

Turning to growth for long-term economic wellbeing is a noble thought. However, for it to be sustainable, it has to be underpinned by the creation of a well-regulated market economy where state institutions effectively regulate, the executive drafts economic policy and is responsible for governance, and a vibrant private sector is in charge of business operations. Our mental model of growth thus becomes one of investment and productivity, driven by all economic agents participating in different economic activities.

A key constraint to the development of competitive markets in Pakistan has been the large and ever-expanding government footprint. A good starting point is to undertake a major divestment effort – outright sale, management contracts, global depository receipts, initial public offerings and secondary public offerings.

Divestment can have a quadruple effect: ease short-term financing issues; create space for the private sector; increase choices of investment on the stock exchange; and, most of all, signal to the world our seriousness for business more than for borrowing.

Reconfiguring Pakistan's energy sector can secure our future. Our end game should be an energy market where energy trades like a commodity and competition and efficiency drive down the unit price – something the country has successfully done in the telecommunications sector. We must be tempted to declare 'an energy urgency' to expedite policy objectives in months – and not years – through divestment; power market liberalisation to enable a multi-buyer multi-seller model; supplying electricity on a pre-payment basis; strengthening a demand-supply management system; and boosting power demand to lower tariffs.

Similarly, in the gas sector, divestment by outsourcing retail management can help manage unaccounted-for gas losses and control pilferage. The country can move to a single consumer tariff, based on a weighted average cost of gas, build the north-south gas pipeline, let the private sector put RLNG terminals and storage units, and remove impediments to accelerated natural gas drilling activities. To prepare the two Sui companies for divestment, we must think about doing away with the return-on-assets model.

The agriculture sector needs price discovery to be left to the market with the government gradually exiting wheat and sugar markets. Waste of perishable

items, estimated at almost one-third of the overall produce, needs a gigantic effort of logistic modernisation. Productivity increase is possible by mandating the registration of firms supplying seeds through the Seed Act and ensuring that they appropriately label their products to cover the information gap. A complete overhaul of the registration process can speed up the approval process of new varieties and reduce the government's footprint. Pricing irrigation water appropriately can incentivise an efficient cropping pattern.

Skewed investment incentives focused on real-estate for decades have taken away the zeal of people to find productive avenues of investment including stock markets and small businesses, besides making land unaffordable. On a longer horizon, it robs people of their inherent ability to research, invent and innovate. We can move to a framework of incentivising productive investments – labour-intensive enterprises.

The current distress of the external sector is primarily due to our reliance on a narrow range of commodity exports – this must change. Boosting exports is also about raising productivity of Pakistani firms. Strategies to upgrade productivity – fostering competition and innovation – can maximise the country's export potential. Entry and exist barriers have a negative impact on our businesses.

Policymakers should also adopt risk-based assessment models; high-risk businesses should be categorised for relevant regulations and medium and low-risk businesses be left to self-declaration for compliance-related issues. The idea is to undertake sweeping reforms doing away with a large part of business regulations as complementary regulatory reforms such as regulatory guillotine take time to gain traction.

Some of the ideas elaborated above have been considered over time. Unfortunately, the scale and quality of a coordinated plan needed to produce worthwhile outcomes remains unsatisfactory. We remain far from shaping a well-functioning market economy in which efficiency leads to a tamed long-term inflationary environment and consumers have an array of choices. An impediment for productivity-led growth is also about writing the story of Pakistan's technology catch-up, which we will leave for another day.

Our choice is clear. It's either a stale, tired and slow economic policy reform, with its outdated reliance on real-estate, borrowed resources, rationed invention, and

opposition to disruption or a fresh alternative, determined to upscale the agriculture and industrial sectors, increase productivity and wages, and let Pakistanis find their own way to prosperity.

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Source: Published in The News

Xi Is Running Out of Time (China's Economy Heads for a Hard Landing) By Daniel H. Rosen

How worried should observers be about China's economy? As recently as midsummer, that seemed like an academic question geared to the long term. In recent months, observers who were already concerned were further dismayed whenever Beijing moved to reel in companies considered to be in the vanguard of the "sunrise industries" that China celebrated as the answer to future competitiveness, growth, and jobs. In response to fresh doubts about the wisdom of these policy campaigns, China's private-sector entrepreneurs competed to demonstrate fealty to their leaders rather than complain, and many foreign investors waved away worries with the message that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders knew what they were doing and should be trusted.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* this past summer, I noted that Chinese President Xi Jinping seemed to believe that he has "another decade to tinker with the country's economic model." In reality, I pointed out, "there are at most a few years to act before growth runs out. If China's leaders wait until the last minute, it will be too late." Events in the past months demonstrate how the clock is running down. Property developers large and small ran out of liquidity to pay their bills, revealing the systemic risks of turning a blind eye to undisciplined property investments and causing a spillover of anxiety into bond markets at home and abroad, where investors had lent money to these firms and to indebted companies in other industries. Perceptions of the Chinese economy's immunity to the dangers of stepping off the market reform path have changed, and concerns have grown that the CCP has missed the window for avoiding a hard landing.

SUMMERTIME BLUES

Things started to unravel in July, when Beijing launched a crackdown on an array of tech companies. Earlier in the year, China's Academy of Cyberspace Studies trumpeted "new driving forces through informatization to promote new development"—an argument that state support would allow growth to continue in high-tech sectors. These were the dynamic parts of the economy most attractive

to financial investors foreign and domestic. Suddenly, however, they have fallen out of favor. New technologies had succeeded at creating comparative advantages for entrepreneurs, resulting in profits and market power. But that led to two problems. First, the market power of tech companies created fortunes for some but contributed to growing income and wealth gaps. Deng Xiaoping, the CCP leader who inaugurated China's "reform and opening" in the late 1970s, had warned that "some people would need to get rich first." But the magnitude of the gaps has begun to pose a threat to social stability.

Second, and arguably more compelling, the growing influence of these private firms was having the effect of reducing the power of the state and the CCP. Arguing that "common prosperity" demanded more government regulation and that national security required that Beijing assert control of these new business giants, authorities stepped in to change the rules, declaring that going forward, for-profit education would be out-of-bounds, initial public offerings overseas would require political approval, and foreign investment in many niches would be restricted. Whether justified or not, the manner in which the CCP changed the regulatory landscape for e-commerce, ridesharing, gaming, and many other sectors lopped an estimated \$1.5 trillion to \$3.0 trillion off the combined stock valuations of firms.

China's local governments are at risk of defaulting.

In August, an even more crucial pillar of the Chinese economy started to crack. Beijing had waited too long to address a nationwide bubble in property values and construction volumes. China's largest property developer, Evergrande, faced ratings downgrades as it struggled to pay debt obligations. In addition to disappointing creditors, the firm was unable to repay money borrowed from its own employees, pay vendors, or finish building apartments it had presold to customers. This led to protests and social tensions that have spilled over to other highly leveraged firms, and property buyers have noticed: September saw the worst national property sales figures of any month since at least 2014, and possibly ever. A resulting drop in land sales across the country is depriving local governments of a major source of revenue, and so they, too, are at risk of defaulting directly or through the quasi-governmental businesses they control, with potential consequences for hundreds of smaller city commercial banks that lend to these companies.

Then, in September, an energy supply crisis began. One reason was that China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) requires utility companies to offer customers fixed prices even though they face variable prices for the coal they need to produce electricity. (Beijing just announced emergency flexibility on these rules.) Disregard for this simple market reality caused many utilities to stop producing rather than suffer escalating losses and join the list of Chinese businesses going bankrupt. Other energy policy missteps followed. In September, the NDRC issued guidance to provincial officials, instructing them that their personnel evaluations would depend heavily on how they met formal energy consumption targets. Under pressure and lacking immediate options to improve energy efficiency, many of these officials ordered businesses to shut down to reduce the demand for power. Energy shortages cut industrial production, even in the thriving export industries that are the main bright spot in the Chinese economy today, including manufacturers of smartphones and automobiles. Throughout September, even residents in the wealthiest places in China such as Beijing experienced rolling blackouts. Estimates for economic growth in 2021 and 2022 have been slashed accordingly.

Financial analysts are self-censoring their research out of fear.

These economic disruptions are fueling a general wariness about China's outlook. Bond traders are now factoring in the rising default risks posed by China's property firms and debating whether to shun other sectors of the economy. Financial analysts are self-censoring their research for fear of offending officials by telling a truthful but pessimistic story; this has led to mistrust and uncertainty in markets. Chinese households are spending more cautiously owing to the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but also because they fear that their net worth might plummet if property prices fall. In October, travel and tourism spending during the National Day holiday was below that of dismal 2020—that is, lower than during the pre-vaccine phase of the pandemic. For the first time since the global financial crisis of 2008, central bankers and other officials outside China are raising concerns about Beijing's ability to handle its financial situation and potential spillover effects. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken went so far as to publicly express hopes that China would handle the situation "responsibly." The CCP's hard-won credibility on economic policy is being eroded under this drumbeat of negative economic news.

A QUESTION OF CREDIBILITY

Observers have worried about China's economy for a long time but have fretted over things that might happen far into the future. Generally, optimistic views about Beijing's ability to maintain growth have prevailed over short-term concerns. That faith should have bought China enough time to do the hard work of reform: to shore up the efficiency of capital allocation, ensure robust competition, depoliticize corporate governance, and otherwise confirm the economy's gradual shift to full marketization. Instead, these efforts at reform stalled and reversed after the potential consequences became apparent to leaders. After numerous failed efforts at reform, there is a limit to how long investors and other governments can maintain their faith in China's directions.

A severe economic slowdown has therefore become a near-term worry, not a distant one. And the most recent responses to mounting threats are not turning a new page: the CCP's moves in the past few months consisted of political campaigns rather than acknowledgments of the financial and technical reform the country needs to restore economic efficiency. Structural problems make clear what a mistake it is to delay market reforms. The promise of "nonmarket" solutions is ringing hollow, again.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

The New Economics By Felicia Wong

Amid the arduous fight in Congress over President Joe Biden's economic agenda, it is easy to lose sight of a more important development: the dramatic shift in economic thinking now taking place not only in the United States but also among many of its allies and partners. In its ambitious economic plan, the Biden administration is doing more than trying to push through a large-scale stimulus. It is also departing from a long-dominant neoliberal consensus—including the position of the Democratic Party itself for much of the past few decades—in favor of a sweeping new vision for economic growth based on privileging work over wealth and planet over profit. In doing so, the administration is moving in tandem with new and recently reelected governments in Canada, Germany, and Japan that are pursuing expansive policies aimed at tackling inequality and decarbonizing the economy.

Meanwhile, leaders in France, Italy, and the United Kingdom are moving in a similar direction, using the levers of state power to promote human welfare and green industries. Many of these leaders are also using the power of EU and national institutions to tame and tax the digital monopolies that are increasingly wreaking havoc with democracies worldwide. Indeed, for the last six years and especially since the pandemic began, leaders and policymakers in many developed democracies have concluded that deeper structural reforms are necessary to counter the right-wing populism that brought former U.S. President Donald Trump and other political figures to power.

The broad international convergence around a new economic framework is significant, because for decades, there has been a similar convergence in the opposite direction: international policymakers privileged trade openness and volume above all, seeking to deregulate markets and support the market-oriented rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This was the so-called Washington consensus, the approach that was formulated in the 1980s based on the neoliberal ideas of privatization and deregulation. Now, the Biden administration and like-minded governments are rethinking that approach in favor of policies that seek to bring new standards to international trade and to use public investment to address issues such as income inequality.

Many of these ideas are only beginning to gain traction, and some face strong political headwinds. Even as Biden has succeeded in getting a historic \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill, he has had to make significant compromises in the negotiations for his even larger social spending package, the Build Back Better bill. But this momentary setback is not a ceding of the vision. Of far greater significance is that such legislation is now under discussion at all. For in its size and ambition, it suggests how far the U.S. administration has already come in embracing an entirely new understanding of how the government can play a crucial role in not only the domestic but also the international economy—an approach that offers powerful new tools for addressing some of today’s greatest challenges.

THE POPULIST BLOWBACK

Among the drivers of Biden’s economic vision has been the recognition by his policy team that decades of trade liberalization have caused real harm to the electorate. Popular discontent with trade policy was one of the crucial dynamics of the 2016 presidential campaign. By taking a populist stance against the trade agreements that had long dominated international policy, Trump was able to exploit the inconsistency between the campaign statements of his opponent, Hillary Clinton—who said she was against the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal—and the position of the Obama administration—which had waged an aggressive campaign to enact the TPP. Trump’s victory and his administration’s hostility to trade deals broke the long-standing bipartisan consensus on trade, and the lesson was not lost on Biden. The new administration, although it has departed from many Trump-era policies, has continued to move away from trade expansion itself as a primary goal of economic policy. Biden’s economic advisers have made clear that the United States will not pursue the TPP or any other trade agreement, for that matter, until Congress passes major new domestic spending legislation and international negotiators rewrite trade rules to include protections for workers and the environment.

Among the measures Biden officials have proposed for reshaping the international trade regime are restrictions on imports of carbon-intensive steel and aluminum; a loosening of intellectual property rules that protect corporate patents in order to better fight pandemics; and prioritizing goods produced domestically with domestic supply chains. Such efforts to control the social effects of trade run directly counter to the dominant approach pursued in Washington for decades, which sought to encourage unrestricted international

commerce. The Biden team's efforts coincide with similar economic policies—such as the European Green Deal—that other governments are carrying out to combat climate change, fight international corporate monopolies, and enforce international tax rules.

That is why the official communique of the G-7 summit in Cornwall in June read so differently from those of past years. Instead of laments about “protectionism” and wait-and-see approaches to climate change (as was shown in the 2016 communique, the last before Trump took office), the 2021 statement openly acknowledges the unequal gains that have resulted from trade and sets specific goals to reduce carbon emissions industry by industry. The shift was also captured by the panel report “Global Economic Resilience” that I co-authored with experts from other G-7 countries and that was released in October. The report sets out to give a conceptual framework for what has been called the Cornwall consensus, a replacement for the Washington consensus.

REWRITING THE RULE BOOK

The G-7 report has several main points. First, trade liberalization should no longer be seen as an end in itself. Not only are tariffs already at historically low rates, but a growing body of economic research has shown that, since the 1990s, many of the trade agreements of the neoliberal era have not been particularly helpful and, in many cases, have been harmful to workers in the United States and abroad. Going forward, governments should focus less on trade agreements centered on tariff reduction per se and more on leveraging trade in the services of more robust regulatory standards, especially to encourage sustainable production. For example, the United States and the EU recently announced plans for the Global Arrangement on Sustainable Steel and Aluminum, which will keep dirty metals out of their markets and produce common ways to measure the embedded emissions in these industries. Notably, the agreement makes no reference to WTO rules or processes. Rather, the two trading giants staked out a common vision and invited the rest of the world to join them. Japan and the United Kingdom reportedly are inclined to do just that.

Existing international trade rules also tend to facilitate what Biden's chief trade representative, Katherine Tai, has called a “race to the bottom” by creating incentives for companies to lower standards to be more competitive. “This is part of the reason why, today, the WTO is considered by many as an institution that not only has no solutions to offer on environmental concerns, but is part of the

problem,” Tai remarked in April. To change this perception, our G-7 panel report calls for trade negotiators to rewrite trade rules to address challenges such as pandemics and the climate crisis, not hinder nations’ responses.

The Cornwall approach also calls on governments to invest more in what we call “high-quality future growth”: supporting the energy transition, including public transportation infrastructure; high-quality education and training; and climate-focused research and development. This is a question of both scale and scope. The economist Nicholas Stern has argued that in order to tackle the climate crisis and put growth levels on a sustainable trajectory, countries need to increase public investment by two percent of national income above pre-pandemic levels, spending collectively at least \$1 trillion every year between now and 2030. The point is to encourage investment that will help desired new sectors of the economy grow rather than focusing on immediate consumption. Indeed, declines in public investment help explain the supply chain woes now roiling ports and industrial production. For example, the EU’s so-called Stability and Growth Pact requires keeping government budget deficits under three percent and overall government debt below 60 percent of GDP. As the economist Joseph Stiglitz has noted, this is onerous in normal times, unwise during business-cycle downturns, and outright lunacy in the face of the urgent, large-scale investments needed to fight climate change. COVID-19 forced the relaxation of those rules, and policymakers in France, Germany, and Italy have called for rethinking them going forward.

The corporate minimum tax upends more than a century of international tax rules.

Governments must also invest in specific policy directions. For example, scientists are developing many promising technologies to enable various industries to reduce carbon emissions more rapidly. But to put these technologies into widespread use, they need governments to create and backstop markets. By making large-scale investments in products such as green steel, governments can create markets, readying new innovations for large-scale private-sector investment. Governments can also make public investments in new technologies that firms can’t or won’t fund. And in both cases, governments can work with communities in and around the new industrial facilities to ensure that they share in the gains. The economist Mariana Mazzucato, a fellow co-

author of the G-7 report, has described this approach as “mission-driven industrial policy.”

Finally, governments need to overhaul how top earners and corporations are taxed and regulated. Between 1995 and 2020, the share of global GDP controlled by the top 0.00001 percent tripled, giving the highest earners extraordinary influence on economic policy. Lobbied by corporations and the superrich, governments have often looked the other way as tax avoidance ballooned. Meanwhile, monopoly and monopsony power—when a single employer such as Amazon dominates a product or labor market—has spread in many areas of the economy, harming consumers and workers alike. The economist Thomas Philippon, another co-author of the G-7 report, has found that decreased competition in many industries now costs the typical U.S. household more than \$5,000 a year. This is at a time when nearly 40 percent of households struggle to pay for an unexpected \$400 expense.

The historic international agreement this fall to establish a 15 percent minimum tax on corporate profits is a step in the right direction. For the first time, more than 130 countries have pledged to adhere to a global floor on tax rates. The largest and most profitable firms will enjoy less discretion over where they are taxed, as countries move closer to what is known as “formulary apportionment”—requiring corporations to allocate their worldwide income to the jurisdictions where their sales, assets, and payrolls are most concentrated. This approach will help workers by ensuring that public funds are available for socially beneficial projects, such as education or paid leave, and by generally helping restore the balance of power between labor and capital. Upending more than a century of international tax rules, the corporate minimum tax shows that large-scale change is possible and achievable.

There is much more to be done, however. As recent investigative reporting on what have been dubbed the “Pandora Papers” has shown, at least five U.S. states have become major offshore havens for international wealth, shielding the assets of national and global elites from public scrutiny and financial accountability. Biden, who spent 36 years as a senator from one such haven, Delaware, could take a strong stand by ending the practice. The president has already taken important steps to limit the power of monopolies, issuing an executive order to promote competition in the economy and putting antitrust experts, such as Lina Khan and Tim Wu, in key administration positions. But the

administration still needs to figure out how to deal with Facebook and other dominant technology companies that do not charge user fees but nonetheless wield enormous political and economic power through their broad control of digital media. European governments are further ahead on this type of regulation, so this is an area in which the United States is playing catch-up.

DEMOCRACY'S BEST DEFENSE

In the United States and many other countries, the elements of a robust new political economic agenda are in place. Yet translating the new approach into new rules will require confronting the vestiges of corporate capture, when large private sector interests gain sway over government policy, a phenomenon that just in the last few months has impeded ambitious efforts to keep the cost of medicines down. In the United States, powerful interests in Washington have resisted the Biden administration's effort to enable Medicare to negotiate drug prices to make them more affordable, and the German government has opposed relaxing WTO intellectual property rules to facilitate global vaccine access.

The Cornwall consensus has challenged rich countries to adopt a new economic worldview in which the state can use its power to limit corporate influence and offer new protections for workers and the environment. To the surprise of many American progressives, the current occupants of the U.S. executive branch agree. In politics, business, and everyday life, there are many signs that the dominance of neoliberal ideas is waning—but proponents of the Cornwall consensus have much work to do to convince both powerful interests and the public to embrace their thinking. There are significant obstacles to putting the new ideas into practice, including not only the difficulties of the legislative process but also the threat of right-wing populism in the United States and elsewhere, which seeks to provide its own, inward-turning and often nativist alternative to the status quo. The appeal of a more nihilistic, less racially and religiously inclusive populism has only grown in the last five years and has gained ground in major political parties in many countries.

The resurgence of forces that seek to undermine democracy also shows how urgently a more inclusive economic vision is needed. As new social science research that reviewed over 100 countries across many decades has shown, democracies have been able to build popular support for their institutions, but only when they are successful at delivering economic growth, stability, and public goods. This brings to mind one of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside

chat observations in 1938: “Democracy has disappeared in several other great nations—not because the people of those nations disliked democracy, but because they had grown tired of unemployment and insecurity, of seeing their children hungry while they sat helpless in the face of government confusion and government weakness through lack of leadership in government.” A similar risk exists today. Governments must show they can act individually and together for the public good. No less than the future of democracy may be at stake.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

Pak-Afghan Trade — Righting the Expectations By Inam Ul Haque

A lot is happening in the Federal Capital to find ways for having a productive relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. I covered the details of a seminar last week under 'Afghanistan, inclusivity, human rights and TTP'.

The 8th Focus Group Discussion (FGD) under the aegis of Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) was held on November 10, 2021, at Islamabad. Discussions were aimed at apprising the Pakistani policymakers of barriers to the bilateral trade and transit. Mr Asad Qaiser, Speaker National Assembly, parliamentarians and representatives from the civil society and business community attended. Afghan delegation was led by Mr Khan Jan Alokozai, Co-Chairman PAJCCI. Following issues were raised by traders from the Afghan side:

First, visa issuance. Afghan delegation asked for reversion to the previous policy of providing six-month multiple-entry visit visa to traders, as against the current policy of Pakistani Embassy stamping a one-month single entry visa. Afghan business community also proposed introducing 'sticker visas' for businesspersons across Pakistan and Afghanistan to facilitate traders' movement.

Second, border restrictions. Afghan side raised concerns on checking of returning empty containers, as it is expensive, cumbersome and time-consuming. They requested both sides to finalise a joint mechanism to resolve this issue after inclusion of traders in these deliberations, as they knew the on-ground situation.

Afghans also requested to streamline tax collection at the entry points to curb excessive and mostly illicit taxes and levies collected under the garb of various departments on the Pakistani side. This practice drains traders financially and runs counter to the claims of easing Pak-Afghan trade. It goes without saying that under the present precarious situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan should reduce its taxes and levies substantially. Abolition of the existing disparity between custom tariffs on both sides should be an essential starting point.

Elimination of clearance delays is also vital to traders on both sides, as perishable goods stranded on either side for want of clearance causes huge financial losses and capacity depletion. The Afghan delegation also pointed out ban on the export of chicken from Pakistan, which has resulted in shortage of chicken and undue profiteering in Afghanistan. Traditionally both KPK and Balochistan have been including Afghan wheat, edible oil, sugar and meat requirements, etc into their provincial budget estimates.

Members of Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industries requested own side to open more entry point on Balochistan's 1,200km-long border with Afghanistan. It was proposed to have 'district-level' entry points to reduce load on the Chaman crossing point.

Third, transit trade. The first-ever goods consignment of trucks from Uzbekistan entered Pakistan via Torkham during November this year. These goods were transited through TIR (Transports Internationaux Routiers or International Road Transport). Convention on International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR Carnets (permits) is a multilateral treaty, concluded at Geneva on 14th November 1975 to ease administrative formalities of international road transport. The Afghan participants asked to formalise Pak-Afghan trade through TIR, however Taliban government's non-recognition would remain a major impediment.

Fourth, APTTA (Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement). The present agreement was signed in 2010, calling for greater facilitation in the movement of goods between the two countries. Mr Alokozai informed that 90% negotiations to revise the present APTTA are complete; and urged both countries to sign the agreement sooner to address the cited issues and discrepancies.

Fifth, road space management. One participant, Mr Ajmal Safi, pointed out the huge traffic congestion at Kharlachi crossing point (Kurram District), caused by trucks carrying coal from Afghanistan. He requested speedy clearance of trucks to ensure smooth flow of trade and address popular concerns during the approaching winter.

Sixth, continued healthcare in Pakistan. The Afghan delegation requested the Government of Pakistan to instruct local hospitals to treat Afghan patients with the same empathy extended to Pakistani patients. Fleecing Afghan patients and

their ill-treatment are some issues needing attention, in order to maintain and foster Pak-Afghan people-to-people (P2P) ties.

The Speaker National Assembly responded to the Afghan delegates, apprising them of the follow-up actions taken to resolve Pak-Afghan trade impediments. These include creating Pak-Afghan Friendship Group (PAFG). He announced inclusion of traders' representatives from both sides in PAFG to gain technical insight.

Mr Qaiser emphasised revival of the previous visa policy, for which he issued on-spot instructions. Mr Salman Baig, Director Special Initiatives, National Assembly, updated all on the issuance of 'Five Years' Business Visa' for Afghan traders. Mr Baig also mentioned Pakistan's offer to keep Chaman border open round the clock, after infrastructural and human resource challenges from Afghan side are addressed. Pakistan also requested Afghanistan to remove infrastructural hindrances/roadblocks at Torkham to make the dual carriageway usable.

Mr Speaker informed all about the formation of a special committee, headed by Dr Moeed Yusuf, National Security Adviser, and Ambassador Sadiq, Pakistan's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, to monitor Pak-Afghan trade on a daily basis. Pakistan is also revising tariffs on several goods; and tariff on perishable goods has already been abolished, besides deletion of 5% levy for scanning empty containers and demurrages and detention charges. This is at loss to the Pakistani exchequer.

According to State Bank of Pakistan, around 130,000 Afghans currently have bank accounts in Pakistan. Pakistan has eased the account opening procedures for Afghans in order to promote documented economy.

Government of Pakistan also has created a special committee for erstwhile FATA to tackle border issues and prevent conflict along the border. PM Imran Khan has strictly ordered not to close any crossing point for trade in future, based on any political eventuality. Various border liaison committees will interact with Afghan counterparts to resolve current challenges/closures at the borders.

Government of Pakistan/Board of Investment is reviewing the longstanding idea of granting citizenship to Afghans, able to invest a certain sum in Pakistan. Many

countries do this, and it would auger well for Pakistan's economy, bilateral trade and P2P contacts.

Realistically speaking, Afghan business community should rationalise its sense of entitlement and expectations from Pakistan. The traders' community needs to ensure that APTTA is not used for smuggling any more. Taliban's present policies in this regard are encouraging.

Pakistan, being a developing country with limited resources, meanwhile, will continue to help Afghans in their hour of need, like in the past. However, righting the expectation through a reality check will do both sides good.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 18th, 2021.

Monetary Correction | Editorial

The SBP in a monetary correction raised its benchmark interest rate by 150 basis points to 8.75% in an attempt to stem inflationary trends, and auto-control the speed of growth and current account deficit. Though such interventions are not new in a regulated economy, what surprised the pundits is the staggering rate and aggressive approach after exhibiting a great amount of conscious control. It remains to be seen how the dipping rupee adopts a semblance of certainty against the dollar, and to what extent inflation is tamed, which is somewhere over the turf of 9%. Now the eyes are set on the international donor, and with the inflow of new tranche from the IMF as the \$6 billion loan programme resumes, it is widely hoped that the present turmoil will start receding.

The move was expected, but its timing and level of projection reflect the deep thinking process underway. Global rise in food and oil prices have unnerved developing economies, and Pakistan's projected growth rate of over 4% was getting tricky to handle. What is required now without much ado is to proceed faster to normalise the monetary policy, and at the same time keep an eye on evolving trends of market forces in pure macroeconomic terms. Curbing down on imports and prudently managing tangibles in exports as the world economy opens up is vehemently advised. Thus, this weekend insertion is technically correct and a calculated move in the right direction.

But there is always a flip side and taking into account the upheavals going around in the regional context, an amount of extra regulation is required. This spontaneous surge in the interest rate could lead to supra-inflation, given that our micro-economic management is a disaster. India and China got away with 8 to 11% of growth in yester-decades because of their tightened control, and this is where we lack expertise. The government should keep pace with its incentivised cash funneling programs such as Ehsaas and Kamyab Pakistan. Subsidising the lower-strata and buoying confidence of the small businesses is the way to go in these tough times.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 22nd, 2021.

International economic (dis)order! By Khalid Saleem

HOW many would recall that fateful day when the United States of America de-linked the US dollar from the gold standard – in what has come to be recognised as the biggest default in the history of international finance? The economic fettle of nations has never been the same again. The International Economic Order continues and is destined to be in a state of sixes and sevens.

The perspicacious reader will recall that the US dollar was once linked to the gold standard at the rate of thirty-five dollars to an ounce of the glittering stuff.

What this meant was that anyone producing thirty-five dollars in cash could rightly lay claim to an ounce of gold.

When the powers that be decided to arbitrarily de-link the US dollar from the gold standard, the price of the precious metal instantaneously rose to the level of around three hundred and fifty dollars an ounce.

The US dollar, in effect, had been subjected to an instant depreciation of nine-tenths of its intrinsic value.

The biggest losers were the nations (mostly developing states) that had maintained their monetary reserves in US dollars. Overnight, the intrinsic worth of their assets fell to a mere ten percent of their original value.

By the same token, the international liability of the United States of America was reduced to ten percent of what it was a day earlier.

What the aforesaid goes to prove is that the International Financial Regime has been anything but equitable, and is open to manipulation by the powers that be.

A small item of news that managed to find an obscure place in the financial pages of newspapers some months back brought back memories of the aforesaid.

What was new in this news item – that, incidentally our financial and economic experts opted to totally ignore – has the potential of one day challenging the inequitable New International Economic Order.

It contained the report that the northern Malaysian state of Kelantan took advantage of the advent of Ramadan to introduce Islamic gold dinars and silver dirhams to promote their usage as an alternative to paper money.

Although the coins were not legal tender, businesses in Kelantan were reported to be using them widely. Possibility of the practice spreading to other states of Malaysia and beyond should not be discounted.

Why is this development of note? The concept of ‘Islamic gold dinar’ as an alternative to the US dollar for intra-Islamic States commercial dealings was first mooted, circa 2000, by former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahatir bin Mohammad.

Mahatir, whose bold economic policies had helped his country surmount the financial crisis created by the international finance institutions, reportedly had a viable roadmap in mind.

It was also generally believed at that time that Mahatir bin Mohammad had completed the groundwork on a grandiose plan to overhaul the OIC, should he be elected as its Secretary-General.

The aforementioned is partially borne out by one’s personal knowledge as the then Assistant Secretary General of that Organization.

The Malaysian Prime Minister had engaged a reputed firm of Consultants to prepare a study on overhauling the OIC and its Charter.

One is in the know because senior representatives of this firm of consultants had informally visited the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah.

Among others, they had a longish in-depth meeting with one on the subject that lasted for two hours and more, during which all relevant factors came under discussion.

Speculation was then rife that Mahatir had shown interest in taking over as Secretary General of the OIC on his retirement as Prime Minister of his country. He was a leader of great vision.

If this had come about, he would not only have made an outstanding Secretary General he could also have helped resuscitate the moribund organization.

The concept of the Islamic gold dinar to be used by the Islamic states as the base of their monetary reserves and for intra-state trade and commerce was possibly intended to be put on the agenda of the OIC for future deliberations.

But this was not to be. For reasons that need not be detailed here, Mahatir's 'dream' was nipped in the bud by the powers that be.

The International Economic Order that continues to be in vogue is anything but equitable.

It is horribly biased against the developing states, who find themselves out-manuevered at every turn by those who hold the key.

The developing world, thus, continues to suffer from the machinations of hoary figures who manipulate the international finance regime as they think fit.

Every once in a while the powers that be decide to turn the screw and the poorer nations find themselves on the receiving end.

The developing countries – much like the Light Brigade – are not expected to 'reason why', but merely 'to do and die'.

Meanwhile, the price of gold which is wide open to manipulation has crossed the barrier of 1,200 dollars an ounce and counting. Only the manipulators know where it will all lead to.

The question that presents itself begging for an answer is: will the developing nations ever become masters of their economic fate, or are they destined to remain addicted to the crumbs off the high table? As things stand, the outlook hardly looks rosy. The portents are not only not promising but actually look ominous.

The fact that the small Malaysian state of Kelantan resolved not to let the idea of the Islamic Gold Dinar die down may yet prove to be the harbinger of good news for the economic future of the Muslim States and the welfare of their peoples.

If only someone would step forward and grasp the nettle. But it would entail major surgery and a period of belt-tightening for which most may be ill-prepared.

Like most revolutionary ideas this one too may look improbable at the moment. But who knows what the future may hold?

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

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Economic Integration — A Foreign Policy

Tool By Amna Ejaz Rafi

East Asia is an economically integrated region. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is expected to come into force in January 2022, are reflective of region's economic integration. The regional countries' collective drive towards economic growth has contributed towards region's cohesion. The economic integration has acted as a balancer against the political competitive tendencies at regional front. The regional countries' tilt towards economic integration underscores the importance of economic security. It also shows that strong economy is the bedrock upon which the political castle is build. The economic agreements are platforms wherein states formulate rules best suited to their well-being and the region at large. With economic growth, states political clout also enhances.

The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a new initiative. CPTPP member states are Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Chile, Mexico and Peru. These countries were initially part of late Transpacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. TPP was the economic arm of US pivot to Asia. Former US President Barack Obama said "the US, not China, should write the regional rules of trade." However, in 2017, the Trump administration withdrew from TPP. The development of CPTPP shows that the regional countries despite the US withdrawal from TPP have continued with the idea of economic integration. CPTPP can be termed a meaningful model of trade integration having membership from the region and beyond. CPTPP's trans-regional character is an attraction for other economic bodies. The engagement with CPTPP is a licence to drive through the Indo-Pacific. For instance, the likely inclusion of EU into CPTPP will provide the former with a trading platform to step into the Indo-Pacific alongside economic gains. EU has trading ties with Japan (Japan-EU FTA) and Australia; both the regional countries would support a like-minded player in CPTPP.

The concept of economic integration and trade liberalisation has led to regionalism and economic growth. However, the critics of plurilateral preferential

trade view the economic groupings as a political response by the West to the 'rise of the rest', in particular China. Edward Luttwak, an early conceptualiser of the idea of geo-economics, opines, "Countries whose economies are under threat from China's policies — policies that seek to make China's industries globally more competitive — should come together to contain China geoeconomically." China has applied to join the economic grouping despite CPTPP political lineage with the US-led TPP. Premier Li Keqiang has said that China wants to "strengthen cooperation in trade through free trade agreements". Cao Xin, Secretary General of Charhar Institute (an International think tank in Beijing), in one of his articles, writes, "China knows that developing economic and trade relations with other countries in the world is the most effective way to hit back at the contain-China policy being carried out by the US and its allies." The CPTPP members, the regional countries, have trade relations with China and are also members of RCEP.

In today's world, the strategic approach to enhance bilateral engagements, to be a trans-regional player and to widen the geopolitical horizon, is not entirely dependent on military capability. Rather to emerge strong at the political front and to counter the adversarial clout, an economic diplomacy backed by economic prowess is a must. The economic organisations and economic corridors have become pivotal to a state's foreign policy. The economic muscle also gauges the region's political outlook. The submarines might send deterring signals to adversary but to counter the challenger and to impede expansionism, economic encounter is a much more potent force. The American Chamber of Congresses from Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and New Zealand have urged the Biden administration to join the CPTPP.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 25th, 2021.

EDUCATION

Improving Quality in Education By M Ilyas Kalhoro

EDUCATIONAL decline is one of the most-talked-about issues. The discourse as to the sector highlights the hindrances towards educational advancement. To remove these, every so often certain measures are taken at governmental level.

Such measures, for example, include increasing budgetary funds, establishing new schools, providing basic facilities in schools, efforts for bringing out-of-school children into schools, employing bio-metric attendance to ensure presence of teachers and so on.

These steps may be beneficial in one way or the other. However, there are some educational predicaments, which if not problematised, may hinder the materialisation of qualitative education.

One such predicament is the prevalent high student-teacher ratio in schools. The Student-Teacher ratio is a crucial indicator of learning environment in classrooms.

Lower the ratio the more conducive learning environment would be. Most of classrooms in public schools, especially in Sindh province, are over-crowded, having more than 100 students enrolled.

To reduce the number of out-of-school children, those at the helm, without taking simultaneous correlative measures for alleviation of the probable accompanying effects, have adopted the policy of enrolling more and more children.

Resultantly, classrooms have become jam-packed. Such classes has its own set of issues: teachers do not find themselves able to attain the set Standard Learning Objectives (SLO); more of teachers' time is consumed in maintaining discipline; four to five students are made to sit on three-seat bench which cause

it difficult for students to concentrate; teachers fail to identify each individual's strengths and weaknesses, and tailor teaching according to their needs.

On the whole, quantitative classrooms create hindrances for promotion of qualitative education.

Without problematising the issue and subsequently taking measures for reducing the students' enrolment, any expected change can not be brought about in the field of education.

Another academic matter subjected to less significance is the role of parental involvement in learning.

Parental involvement, as has been proved by many studies, produces positive effects on learning of children and helps in improving their academic grades.

Here teachers are thought to be solely responsible for academic performance of students, whereas responsibilities of parents in this context are somehow overlooked.

Being an educator, I have witnessed that the relatives of just 5-10 students, in a classroom of 100-plus students, come to inquire about the academic performance of their children.

While others do not even bother to visit the school and meet their children's teachers. Their disengagement influences the learning of their children.

If promoted ,the involvement of parents in education can be helpful in diverse ways; (1) the attendance of students in classrooms will improve when the parents will accompany their children towards school (2) learning outcomes in classrooms will improve when students come to know that their parents are in interaction with their teachers as to inquiring their performance (3) behaviour of students will get reformed when they know that their attitude at school and at home are being monitored by their teachers and parents through interaction between themselves (4) the performance of teachers and school administration will likely improve as they will have to satisfy visiting parents on matters relating to the learning of children .

In an attempt to fostering learning, one of the most helpful factors is the promotion of the trend of parental involvement in education that is significantly missing.

Assessment is also an invaluable aspect of education requiring prioritised focus. Sadly, it has not been attached that importance particularly in public schools.

Teachers remain obsessed with completing the course material overlooking the level of understanding and learning of students.

Their focus remains on pleasing the school administration, by covering more and more topics of the assigned syllabus.

The administration on its part, in order to escape the fury of any visiting officer, tries to ensure that in every classroom enough course material remain covered and with this end in view pressurises teachers.

In all this, what is lost is very much needed focus on evaluating the understanding and learning of students.

For students and teachers education becomes the name of keeping completed the fair notebooks of different subjects and nothing more.

Unless the appraisal and assessment of the learning of students in classrooms is sufficiently valued and pursued, the true aim of education, that is enhancing knowledge and skills, can not be attained.

Teachers will be better able to impart knowledge if they are aware of the weaknesses and strengths of their students. And this can be ascertained through conducting assessment activities in classrooms.

Remaining focussed on completing the syllabus is a good thing, but at the cost of the time of assessment it is certainly not.

The efforts for educational advancement will derive intended results only when all relevant issues and problems are pinpointed and managed.

Most of the times, measures taken for reforming education do not take into account important factors and that spoils positive outcome of such measures. The need is to problematize such issues and take steps for mitigation of their effects.

Lowering the teacher-student ratio, enhancing parental involvement in education and increasing assessment activities in classrooms will surely help in begetting the standardized system of learning.

—The writer is an educationist and academic researcher, based in Larkana, Sindh.

Source: Published in pakobsever

Who Cares About the SNC? By Arooj Naveed Haq

Conversations surrounding the Single National Curriculum (SNC) have steadily intensified. From a curricular reform conceived of in bureaucratic offices, the SNC has become a matter of heated debate across drawing rooms in our country. But why?

One would imagine that in a country where the state of public education has long been abysmal — a situation that has led practitioners in the field to label Pakistan, “the graveyard of education reform” — our concerns on the curriculum would not begin and end with questions of whether or not female characters in textbooks are depicted with hijabs; what the religious agenda behind these reforms is; what will be the implications for elite private schools, et al.

These are compelling questions, of course, and tell us about the political bend of our time. However, many of these concerns are arising because finally, they concern us and our children. That is, anxieties are greater now about the implications elite schools and children will face given the vicissitudes of a political regime that cares deeply about appeasing conservative forces throughout the country. The truth, however, is that children in our public schools have not only long been dealing with school environments that foster rote-memorisation, low expectations, corporal punishment, evaluation systems that fail to set them up for real learning, and linguistic challenges that limit comprehension, but the average Pakistani student enrolled in public school has been consuming deeply religious and nationalistic propaganda for a very long time.

The environment at the average public school is not only deeply authoritarian, with little room for questioning or doubt, but zealous hatred of a certain neighbouring country, inaccurate histories about our political and religious roots, a tendency towards using violence to discipline, and poorly concealed animosity towards women that are too visible, have been hallmarks of the government school. Things have been bad for quite some time now, and it’s a tragedy that the little discourse we have around education in Pakistan is divorced from the historic functioning of the typical public school classroom, and the reality that an

education policy reform like the SNC — one that is so politically aligned with the government of the time — tends not to last as regime change happens.

When you enter the average Pakistani classroom, one of the first things you notice is that teachers write things on the board, and students copy them down. The dynamics of this process may vary between schools; with some where discipline through violence is more common a practice than others. The content of what is actually taught is a greater problem in contexts where students are allowed and encouraged to understand what they are doing, and why they are doing it. In the absence of an environment that incentivises teachers to actually explain what is otherwise gibberish on a board, and have students draw connections between topics and their lived realities — learning cannot happen. Critiques that obsessively focus on the content of what is or is not taught in our schools miss out on the entire point: the things that are taught are hardly taught. They are put in writing for future reproduction. The real crisis is not in the content, but in the classroom.

Our students in public schools are not learning, and they have not been learning for a very long time. We need to stop getting distracted by surface-level critiques of whatever reform is the latest in our time, and dig deeper to understand why students are not learning in the first place. At the least, public education should not only matter when we think it will impact elite schools, and elite children, and debates on the future of education for an entire country should really make their way out of our drawing rooms and into our least privileged classrooms.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 9th, 2021.

Education System in Doldrums By Zeeshan

Ahmad Khan

The education system of Pakistan has failed to perform effectively for many years. Rote memorization has been at the heart of the issue which dominates the public schooling system. Besides, the present system of examinations is designed in such a way that only tests memory rather than the understanding of the subject. The main cause of this symbolic state of examinations is a single prescribed textbook for each subject.

Words and phrases such as learning outcomes, comprehension, application and analytical ability are being mentioned widely in the backdrop of the Single National Curriculum (SNC). However, in reality, only the single assigned textbooks are used to set questions in the final examinations. The model textbooks which were designed under the SNC have a list of questions at the end of each chapter which are only for the reproduction of text for the answer. As a result of such construction, students are instructed to memorize certain portions of text books, and it is particularly urged on them to learn the questions at the end of the chapter.

Decades ago, there was no concept of a single prescribed textbook for a subject. At that time, authors were invited to design textbooks as per the prescribed curriculum and boards of education approved books after checking their validity in accordance with curricular guidelines. Consequently, a number of approved books for each subject were available in the market. Schools were free to choose textbooks for their students. Therefore, examination, at that time, was not based on a particular text but focused on competencies. The marketplace determined the fate of the textbooks. Those which helped the students achieve the best result were the ones to survive.

This method of formulating textbooks by individual authors was changed after the Sharif Commission Report of 1959. The Report suggested the formation of a specialized body for production of textbooks, because formation of textbooks was a laborious task and could not be left to individual authors. Moreover, the establishment of textbook boards for each province was proposed by the commission. The report further stated that only the textbooks written by the

provincial boards would be applicable to their respective provinces. In this backdrop, an East Pakistan Textbook Board and a West Pakistan Textbook Board were set up.

The Pakistani youth has been bearing the brunt of the flawed education policy based on rote memorization. Poor performance of students of public and low-cost private schools in basic skills of language and arithmetic are unequivocal. Fossilization of these deficiencies could impact their professional careers.

As a result of the establishment of the provincial textbook boards, the quality of education and competition suffered a lot. This exclusive control of the boards over the production of textbooks produced substandard books with poor pedagogy and cheap printing. Moreover, this move narrowed down the scope of learning. In short, quality of education was severely affected due to such a monopolistic act.

It also confined examinations to the material in the textbook, resulting in the development of a culture of rote memorization and a surging in the number of tuition centres and get-through guidebooks.

Today, the situation is also abysmal. Handpicked authors of textbooks are paid handsomely. These authors introduce a new edition every year with slight changes only for financial gain at the expense of parents.

Efforts to end the system of single textbooks and to reintroduce the practice of multiple books of the past were made in 2007 under the National Textbooks and Learning Materials Policy. To abolish the monopoly of provincial textbooks boards, authors and publishers would have been invited in open competition with several approved textbooks for each subject and grade. However, the attempt was not allowed to materialize due to parochial interests of a few, preventing it from happening.

Now, the destructive policy of a single textbook has been imposed on schools by the existing government under SNC. These textbooks which are substandard and low quality in nature are prepared by the MOFE. The provincial textbook boards are instructed to print them. This means teachers and students follow one book per subject per class. The development of cognitive skills which is much touted under the SNC is reversed. The Pakistani youth has been bearing the brunt of the flawed education policy based on rote memorization. Poor

performance of students of public and low-cost private schools in basic skills of language and arithmetic are unequivocal. Fossilization of these deficiencies could impact their professional careers.

The first measure is to abolish the single textbook policy. Curriculum- defined learning outcomes are to be given priority while setting exam questions.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Back to Normal Education | Editorial

The reigning coronavirus pandemic has taken a toll on all walks of life, and education is one of its prime victims. The way syllabus and the process of examinations were tailor-made during the turbulent times of infection were exceptional. This has adversely impacted the learning skills of students, especially those who were gearing up to appear in public examinations. Curtailing of school hours, scrapping of compulsory subjects and the state getting benevolent to provide grace marks and promotion to next classes are a tale to be told! This should come to an end now, and the process of judging the skills and academic talent of students should reverse to normal. It will not only usher in confidence among hard working pupils, but also enable the competence of our otherwise compromised education system to at least get back on the track.

The federal education minister's synopsis to roll back the discretion and get real is on the spot. It is a good omen that academicians and provincial educational peers are on board too. The education system after a process of trial and error during the pandemic needs reorientation, and it is a must that all stakeholders usher in their professional input. Students, too, should shrug off the lenient blanket that they adored during the peak of infection, and come back strongly into academics.

It is, however, a positive aspect too that the tough days underscored the need for learning digital tools, and millions of backward students managed to glimpse through what technology is all about. The national television's special transmission and the out-of-way efforts of many of the schools to disseminate online classes are highly appreciated. A special thanks also goes out to teachers who not only pooled in extra hours to be online with their pupils, but also took the pain to report compulsory attendance during the pandemic.

With the infectious syndrome getting normal, and universal vaccination underway, it's time to restore the balance. Ensuring SOPs during travel and in classes, students and teachers should come forward to overcome the deficiencies that had set in during the last two years in the learning process.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 22nd, 2021.

Full Syllabus | Editorial

THE recent announcement by the federal education authorities that all exams, based on the entire syllabus, would be held at the end of the current academic year might have come as an unpleasant surprise to several students. After at least a year and a half of online or missed classes or preparing at home by themselves, going back to the 'old normal' of attending classes in person must have felt like a big adjustment to make. Students all over the country have had a rough couple of years: with the spread of Covid-19, there have been frequent school closures and multiple last-minute announcements about the holding or cancellation of exams. However, the government compensated students — especially those waiting to take board exams — with grace marks while those in the lower classes were promoted on the basis of their year-round performance. This leniency was shown despite the fact that most schools and colleges taught an abridged syllabus due to various logistical and practical reasons.

Under these circumstances, the decision to test students on the full syllabus might not be easy. Every year, the syllabus becomes more demanding as students are expected to know the content of learning material taught the previous year. Hence, students in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, who have studied from a shortened syllabus the preceding year and then awarded grace marks for passing the final board exam might find it difficult to cope. This would also raise the issue of merit. In the meantime, unprepared students are being hurled into the new academic year to face the onslaught of the full academic course, while even hardworking students, who have experienced constraints, such as poor access to laptops and smartphones, might not achieve the grades they deserve. If the authorities are going to assess students on the basis of the full syllabus then they should also ask schools to conduct make-up classes for the year lost to ensure a level playing field for all students.

Published in Dawn, November 23rd, 2021

Education Investment Impact on Learning

By M Zahid Rifat

compared to other countries, particularly those in the region, Pakistan is somehow ranked low in the region in terms of educational indicators such as expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling and inequality in education.

The incumbent federal government quite obviously is fully cognizant of the national education crisis, as over 22.84 million children were still out of school and as much as 41 per cent of fifth grade students unable even to read simple stories in basic languages.

According to Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2018-19, literacy rate in the country was stagnant at around 60 per cent with urban literacy rate at 74 per cent and rural literacy rate at 51 per cent.

Literacy in Punjab province is slightly higher at 64 per cent as compared to Sindh and Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa (including merged districts) at 57 per cent and 55 per cent respectively while this rate was even lower at 40 per cent in Balochistan, area-wise largest and sparsely populated province of the country.

Furthermore, literacy rate for male population was reported to be at 71 per cent while that of female literacy rate was substantially lower at 49 per cent.

According to figures available from official sources, school attendance across Pakistan was reported to be around 60 per cent while Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) at primary level was 87 per cent and Net Enrolment (NER) was 66 per cent.

Likewise, middle level GER and NER were 63 per cent and 38 per cent respectively while matric level GER and NER figures were placed at 57 per cent and 27 per cent respectively.

Gender Parity Index (GPI) in literacy was only 0.69 per cent on the whole level while at the primary and secondary levels the figures were 0.92 and 0.89 respectively.

One of the major concerns of the authorities concerned at the federal and provincial levels was how to mitigate the loss of exacerbated learning with over 50 million learners affected due to pandemic of COVID-19 during financial 2020-21.

This situation entailed higher risk of increase in out-of-school children, widening of gender disparity and flaring learning poverty.

Concerted efforts as such were direly needed to focus on reducing huge number of out-of-school children (22.8 million, exacerbated to 50 million due to COVID-19).

Provincial governments are required to make concerted serious efforts to strengthen modules for training for training of both teachers and education managers to deal with similar challenges in the future. Improving gender parity and literacy rate were obviously the areas of special focus in the education sector.

As for the measures being taken at the federal level for improving the overall education sector in the country, as many as 23 projects were included in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) 2020-21, including 20 ongoing projects and 3 new projects which were initiated by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.

These projects aimed at introducing a uniform curriculum, capacity building of teachers and principals, recruitment of teachers, establishment, renovation and up-gradation of schools and colleges, improving gender disparity, education voucher scheme, improving educational assessment system and Knowledge Economy Initiative.

The federal government was apparently committed to strengthen education system and invest on human capital development.

Projects initiated by the incumbent federal government for human capital included Tele School for Grades 1-12; National Education Action Plan for COVID-19; Establishment of National Curriculum Council Secretariat; Balochistan Human Capital Investment Project; Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa Capital Investment

Project; Punjab Human Capital Investment Project, and; Sindh Early Learning Enhancement through Classroom Transformation.

As for the measures being initiated or planned by the federal and provincial governments under PSDP 2021-22 are concerned, the federal government was attaching due priority to the strengthening of basic and college education system.

Towards this end, 24 development projects including 20 ongoing projects for Basic and College Education with an allocation of Rs 4873.74 million were listed in the PSDP for ongoing financial year.

Under PSDP 2021-22, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training which had taken a lead on several initiatives for improving education quality and access as well as for mitigating the education losses during pandemic of COVID-19, was allocated an amount Rs 4.7 billion .

The Ministry has also undertaken ASPIRE programme initiative for effectively countering the education inequities at inter-provincial and inter-district levels for lagging areas all over Pakistan.

Substantial amount of Rs 4 billion was in the process of being disbursed to reduce imbalances in education quality and access.

Two major programmes namely Response Recovery and Resilience Project and Pandemic Response Effectiveness in Pakistan have also been launched for addressing disparities disruption in education continuity and learning losses due to continued prevalence of the pandemic.

Interactive and digital content for tech-based media was also in the process of being created , updated, contextualized and disseminated through television, radio and prevalent education technology platforms.

Similarly, other programmes included provision of basic education missing facilities, establishment/ up-gradation of boys and girls schools and colleges, knowledge economy initiatives, teachers training institutes etc.

National Curriculum Council Secretariat has also been set up for ensuring effective coordination among federating units in development and reviewing of

Single National Curriculum from Grade pre-1 to X11, Teachers Training Modules, Standards for Quality Education and National Curriculum Framework.

Updating the national curriculum by adopting new knowledge relevant to the needs of 21st century and focusing upon creative and critical thinking, instead of rote learning was also the priority agenda of the incumbent federal government.

Information was also available from official sources as to what was being done regarding improving education investment impact on learning by the Provincial Government of the Punjab, Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan but the same has been held back for want of space, please.

—The writer is Lahore-based Freelance Writer, Columnist and retired Deputy Controller (News) , Radio Pakistan, Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Quest For Quality Education By Faisal Bari

UNIVERSITY students from across Pakistan will be protesting today. One of their demands is for the recent fee hike to be taken back and for tuition fees and other educational expenses to be kept low. For the school sector the problem, not the solution, is simpler. Article 25A of the Constitution clearly states that all five- to 16-year-olds should have access to 'free' education. They should not be charged for education, up to matriculation at least, under this article.

But providing quality education is expensive. Buildings, infrastructure, teachers, materials and management cost a lot. The cost of each item is higher if minimum quality standards are to be observed. If public-sector schools cannot charge students for costs, the government/ society must find a way to pay the cost of education. For now, the government pays all expenses. But schools are severely underfunded so the provision is at a significant cost on both fronts: access to education and quality of education.

For better access, as Article 25A stipulates, we'll have to increase funding for the education sector significantly. The same applies if we want to improve the quality. Not every rupee of the current allocation for education is being spent in the most efficient way, but even if all the wastage and poor allocations were to be remedied, we would still need more resources to provide for all children who are out of school and for ensuring better-quality provision for all who are and will be in school. Society must acknowledge this if 25A and 'Education for All' are to be a goal.

At the university level, the argument gets more complex. There is no 'right' to university education in Pakistani law. We need many university-educated people for sustainable growth of the economy. University education also provides significant private returns so it is understandable that several young people want university degrees. But these arguments are not rights-based arguments. They are arguments about the instrumentality of higher education.

How do we see the students' demand to keep higher education costs low?

The private returns argument (if I get a degree I can have higher returns in the future which will be good for my family and me) doesn't give much support for

public funding of university education. Why should the state fund a person for his or her private gains? The state will have an interest if private returns to a person create some public returns for society too. The argument will have to be on the basis that having more university educated people allows Pakistan to have better human resources across all work sectors, makes higher and sustainable growth possible, improves the quality of life, and possibly, has benefits on the side of governance too. These arguments will justify subsidising education to ensure society gets the benefits mentioned.

In particular, if we feel that people should have opportunities based on potential and merit, and not their ability to pay, thus making higher education accessible to people who can't afford to pay for it, it becomes an important policy goal for the government. But this still does not mean that every person who can, should have access to higher education. The instrumental arguments do not establish rights and do not cover all people who fall in a particular age or education level category.

How do we then see the students' demand to keep higher education costs low? It is a complex issue. Higher education is even more expensive to provide than school education. For sciences, laboratories are a major expense. For all subjects, faculty salary is the biggest ticket item. At higher education levels, research becomes an integral part of education provision and funding for it demands a significant proportion of funds too. If universities cannot charge students, where will they get the money from? Higher education funding for the last three years or so hasn't increased. In some years, in fact, funding has decreased. So, how do we square the circle?

Read more: [Cash-strapped DI Khan agriculture varsity using tuition fees to pay staff](#)

Inflationary pressures have also been eroding the power of budgets set in nominal terms. Faculty and staff have been arguing for higher salaries. If faculty/staff salaries do not keep pace with inflationary pressures and the opportunity costs of being at a particular university or in academia in general, people start leaving and this has an impact on the quality of provision: we do want the very best teachers and researchers we can get.

It is unlikely that philanthropy will fill the gap for subsidising quality education for all (school level) and for those who have potential/ merit (university level). Philanthropy, though not insubstantial in Pakistan, is mainly not through formalised channels. The share of education is also not too large and very little of it, even out of the amount that goes towards education, is for higher learning. Currently, we do not have a significant local funding base for research. Most research funding for now comes from the university's own funds, HEC or overseas donors.

Quality education for every child up to matriculation or intermediate and for those who have the merit/ potential to attend university and contribute to national development is important. But quality education costs money. Given the levels of poverty in Pakistan and overall income distribution, most parents cannot pay for it. The state has taken on the responsibility of giving quality education to all children for the first 10 years. But it is not giving priority to this goal even now. Higher education too remains severely underfunded even when only a small number of those who should be getting higher education are doing so. And it seems the state has no intention of increasing funding for education in the near future. We seem to be in a poor equilibrium and there seems to be no way out of it for now. So, all children will not get education, and compromises on quality, for those who are in schools and universities, will continue.

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and an associate professor of economics at Lums.

Published in Dawn, November 26th, 2021

As the Higher Education Sector is responsible to produce new knowledge through various post-graduate and research projects carried out in the universities & degree awarding institutions.

Is the World in For Water Wars Next? By Khalid Saleem

COMING upon one of those billboards that blight the skyline of the major cities of this blessed land, one learnt to one's horror that a certain bottled brand had the distinction of being "Pakistan's favourite water".

This was news indeed, since local lore one had grown up with always had it that any locality's favourite water was the one that came out of the deep well next to the mosque.

At least this was the case, a few decades ago, which was presumably the last time 'elders' gathered round to consider the issue.

Maybe, unbeknown to one, the situation had radically changed after nine/eleven, just as everything else has. But, then, why announce it on billboards?

The one reason that one can think of for this haste to announce it from the housetops (read, billboards) is that our economy whiz kids have all of a sudden realized that there is big money to be made from water.

This commodity, that was once not only freely available but was also considered nature's gift to humankind, has now – thanks to the mixed priorities of our merry band of planners – become a saleable commodity and one out of which millions could be earned without much effort.

The only hurdle in the way of the cut-throat brigade aforementioned was the way this precious commodity was available in plenty in this Land of the Pure (read Poor).

So, what better way to vault this hurdle than to contaminate our natural sources of water so as to oblige an already impoverished multitude to get addicted to

bottled water they could ill afford? What will they think of next? Bottled fresh air, perhaps!

One would crave the indulgence of the gentle reader to digress a bit from the matter at hand.

One may be old fashioned, but one can distinctly remember the time when the ultimate thirst quencher was, well, plain water! When one felt thirsty one instinctively went for a refreshing glass of fresh water.

And if one felt like living it up a bit when the weather was warm, one opted for the luxury of iced water.

That appears now to be history. This is not the done thing any more if you happen to belong to the benighted but bejeweled brigade.

It is considered to be infra-dig to imbibe water if you happen to be thirsty; you are supposed to go for what is euphemistically called 'a beverage'. For those who still thirst for plain old water, the powers that be happen to have another trick up their sleeve.

They have thought up what is now known as 'designer water'. Public Relations agents have thereby managed to give a whole new meaning to the phrase 'liquid assets'. The resultant 'war of beverages' has been on for a while.

Aerated waters and colas have enjoyed a monopoly of sorts over the beverage market for quite some time now. The investors, it would appear, are further looking at the emerging market of some twenty billion dollars for what are known as 'alternative beverages'.

The mind boggles! If this were the story confined merely to the so-called developed world one would not get overly excited about the affair. But there is more to it than meets the eye.

The irony is that while this game is being played in the prosperous societies – and by association in the prosperous segments of the poorer societies – the overwhelming majority of the world's population does not have access to clean drinking water.

Those (among them the inhabitants of our blessed land) whom nature has endowed with abundant water resources are being deliberately denied access to this natural resource by their 'planners' in order to swell the local market for the beverage multinational giants.

Meanwhile, children of numerous societies around the world continue to die by the hundreds of thousand every day because they are condemned to drinking contaminated water.

At this point, one could perhaps take the liberty of reminding the multinational beverage giants of their duty towards humanity at large. Profits from the sale of bottled beverages (even if we are to count only the developing world markets) are astronomical.

Would it be too much to expect these multinational giants to put aside a small proportion of their profits (say ten percent) to be utilized – under the general supervision of the United Nations – for projects intended for the express purpose of making clean drinking water available to the deprived sections of the world populace? Such projects could help raise the image of the United Nations from an ineffectual debating society to that of a utilitarian Organization working for the general uplift of the 'peoples' it is supposed to represent. Meanwhile, the beverage wars go on unabated.

Bottled water and the alternative drinks with their eye-catching names add to the flavour of the contest. The multinational giants continue to rake in billions. The Third World and the common man, as is the norm, remain on the receiving end where they belong!

After this digression of sorts, one could perhaps hark back to the res, as legal eagles are wont to put it. History as we know has seen wars over the control of various natural resources.

The most recent have been the wars for the control of oil. It appears highly likely that the wars of the foreseeable future will be on the control of the world's water resources.

In the Middle East and occupied Palestine the struggle for the control of the sources of water is already on.

India's obduracy about Jammu and Kashmir can be directly traced to her desire to control the upper reaches of the sources of water flowing into Pakistan.

An authority on ecology once said: "there is no problem faced by a developing country that cannot be traced back to water: either its shortage or its surfeit". The world has learned the hard way to take water seriously. As always, we are several steps behind.

Still, it is never too late to make amends. There are bitter lessons to be learnt from history. The world may be in for "water wars" to follow the ones for the control of fuel oil. As they say, fore-warned is fore-armed.

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

Source: Published in pak obsever

Poverty, Covid-19 and Climate Change By

Rashid A Mughal

ACCORDING to a latest report on Global poverty, 689 million people live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 a day.

Children and youths account for two-thirds of the world's poor, and women represent a majority in most regions. Extreme poverty is increasingly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa.

About 40% of the region's people live on less than \$1.90 a day. Extreme poverty rates nearly doubled in the Middle East and North Africa between 2015 and 2018, from 3.8% to 7.2%, mostly because of crises in Syria and Yemen.

Poverty is a multifaceted challenge and providing reliable and responsible financial services to those facing extreme poverty — like education, health care, clean water or access to energy is part of solution.

For poor families in the developing world, living in poverty means trying to survive with few options and opportunities. One illness, poor harvest or major weather event can be catastrophic.

Ultimately poverty impacts individuals and entire economies. A country with 80% of its population lacking access to basic financial services (just as many countries in Africa) cannot progress. The devastating reality of poverty around the world becomes clear when you begin to understand the facts about poverty.

Unfortunately, many young people from underserved communities want to work but lack the resources they need to get and keep a job. Their challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

Without the education, skill and confidence they need to regain their footing on the career ladder, they may never fully recover financially, leaving families and communities even further behind.

Unless someone gives them a chance, they will remain trapped in a cycle of poverty. There are 4.6 million young people aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor at work.

These disconnected youths are sometimes referred to as Opportunity Youth and, if they are not connected to a career pathway by the age 25 they are likely to face a lifetime of struggle with a high risk of unemployment, poverty. One in four young adults aged 20-24 were out of work in April 2020.

Industries hit the hardest by the pandemic, like food and retail, employ a high proportion of young workers.

35% of youth aged 15-29 are employed in low-paid and insecure jobs on average, compared to 15% of people aged 30-50 and 16% of workers aged 51 and above.

Every year, young adults who are not in school or working cost US taxpayers 93 billion annually in lost revenues and increased social services.

Over the course of their lifetimes, a cohort of disconnected youths can cost US taxpayers as much as 1.6 trillion. Orphaned and vulnerable children living in extreme poverty are abused, sick and isolated from their community.

Handouts and begging helps them to survive temporarily. We need solutions to address all their challenges, across eight areas of life, equipping them to overcome poverty with their own efforts — and for good.

Poverty in Pakistan rose to over 5% in 2020, estimates World Bank. The World Bank (WB) has estimated that poverty in Pakistan has increased from 4.4 per cent to 5.4 per cent in 2020, as over two million people have fallen below the poverty line.

Pakistan's economy has been growing, albeit, slowly over the past two decades though the rest of the world has made huge strides in overcoming global poverty. Since 1990, more than 1.2 billion people have risen out of extreme poverty. Now, 9.2% of the world survives on less than \$1.90 a day, compared to nearly 36% in 1990.

But the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse years of progress in the fight against global poverty and income inequalities and it jeopardizes the future of a generation of children.

COVID-19 drove an additional 97 million people into extreme poverty in 2020, according to World Bank estimates.

More than two years into the pandemic, the World Bank stresses, “There is still much we don’t know” concerning its impact on global poverty in 2021.

When families move out of poverty, children’s health and well-being improve. Since 1990, the number of children under the age of 5 dying — mostly from preventable causes such as poverty, hunger and disease — is less than half of what it was, dropping from about 34,200 a day to over 14,200.

Though UN Vision is committed to ending extreme poverty and laying the foundation for every child to experience promise of decent life in all its fullness, yet eradicating global poverty is hard, particularly in fragile contexts but there is hope that things will change, eventually. Ending extreme poverty is a priority for all the nations.

By 2030, as part of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, global leaders aim to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, by that time.

Although countries impacted by fragility, crises and violence are home to about 10% of the world’s population, they account for more than 40% of people living in extreme poverty. By 2030, an estimated 67% of the world’s poor will live in fragile contexts.

About 70% of people older than 15 who live in extreme poverty will have no schooling or only some basic education.

1.3 billion people in 107 developing countries, which account for 22% of the world’s population, will live in multi-dimensional poverty. About 84.3% of multi-dimensionally poor live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Climate change and poverty are closely interlinked. Climate change looms over all countries, threatening severe droughts, supercharged storms and blistering heat waves. But these consequences are unevenly felt around the world.

Above all, they threaten the most vulnerable populations across the globe. Climate change is going to amplify the already existing divide between those who have resources and those who do not.

We are already seeing the impacts of climate change around the world, and the latest reports clearly illustrate that we are very quickly heading towards experiencing them at a greater scale and degree of severity than we had previously understood.

As global temperatures and sea levels rise, as the oceans acidify and precipitation patterns get rearranged, people living in poverty are the most severely impacted.

Since climate change affects everything from where a person can live to their access to health care, millions of people could be plunged further into poverty as environmental conditions worsen. This is especially true for poor people living in low-income countries.

Just as climate change deepens inequalities within a country, it also further stratifies international relations because some nations are more threatened by it than others. Poor countries have fewer resources to deal with the problem.

The world's poorest communities often live on the most fragile land, and they are often politically, socially and economically marginalized, making them especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

More frequent and intense storms, flooding, drought, and changes in rainfall patterns are already impacting these communities, making it difficult for them to secure decent livelihoods.

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

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Can the United States Discourage Sino-Russian Alignment? By George Beebe

Preventing adversaries from dominating the Eurasian landmass is a strategic imperative for the United States. Although Washington has recently awoken to the dangers that growing Chinese power poses in this regard, another threat has received comparatively little attention: the emergence of an increasingly anti-U.S. partnership between China and Russia. The combination of China's economic and technological heft with Russia's abundant resources and potent military could produce capabilities far greater than the sum of either country's individual strengths.

Is Moscow intent on strategic alignment with Beijing regardless of U.S. policies? What is driving Chinese policy toward Russia? And what, if anything, can the United States do to discourage Sino-Russian alignment against American interests?

The Center for the National Interest and an all-star panel of experts discussed these important questions.

Emma Ashford is a resident senior fellow with the New American Engagement Initiative in the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council.

George Beebe is Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for the National Interest.

Paul Heer is a Distinguished Fellow at the Center for the National Interest and a non-resident senior fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Fyodor Lukyanov is one of Russia's foremost experts in foreign affairs, serving as Chairman of the Presidium of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, editor in chief of Russia in Global Affairs, and research director of the Valdai Discussion Club.

Dimitri K. Simes (President & CEO of the Center for the National Interest) moderated the discussion.

Source: Published in The National Interest

The Age of America First (Washington's Flawed New Foreign Policy Consensus) By Richard Haass

Donald Trump was supposed to be an aberration—a U.S. president whose foreign policy marked a sharp but temporary break from an internationalism that had defined seven decades of U.S. interactions with the world. He saw little value in alliances and spurned multilateral institutions. He eagerly withdrew from existing international agreements, such as the Paris climate accord and the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, and backed away from new ones, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He coddled autocrats and trained his ire on the United States' democratic partners.

At first glance, the foreign policy of U.S. President Joe Biden could hardly be more different. He professes to value the United States' traditional allies in Europe and Asia, celebrates multilateralism, and hails his administration's commitment to a "rules-based international order." He treats climate change as a serious threat and arms control as an essential tool. He sees the fight of our time as one between democracy and autocracy, pledging to convene what he is calling the Summit for Democracy to reestablish U.S. leadership in the democratic cause. "America is back," he proclaimed shortly after taking office.

But the differences, meaningful as they are, obscure a deeper truth: there is far more continuity between the foreign policy of the current president and that of the former president than is typically recognized. Critical elements of this continuity arose even before Trump's presidency, during the administration of Barack Obama, suggesting a longer-term development—a paradigm shift in the United States' approach to the world. Beneath the apparent volatility, the outlines of a post–post–Cold War U.S. foreign policy are emerging.

The old foreign policy paradigm grew out of World War II and the Cold War, founded on the recognition that U.S. national security depended on more than just looking out for the country's own narrowly defined concerns. Protecting and advancing U.S. interests, both domestic and international, required helping shepherd into existence and then sustaining an international system that,

however imperfect, would buttress U.S. security and prosperity over the long term. Despite missteps (above all, the misguided attempt to reunify the Korean Peninsula by force and the war in Vietnam), the results largely validated these assumptions. The United States avoided a great-power war with the Soviet Union but still ended the Cold War on immensely favorable terms; U.S. GDP has increased eightfold in real terms and more than 90-fold in nominal terms since the end of World War II.

There is far more continuity between the foreign policy of Joe Biden and that of Donald Trump than is typically recognized.

The new paradigm dismisses the core tenet of that approach: that the United States has a vital stake in a broader global system, one that at times demands undertaking difficult military interventions or putting aside immediate national preferences in favor of principles and arrangements that bring long-term benefits. The new consensus reflects not an across-the-board isolationism—after all, a hawkish approach to China is hardly isolationist—but rather the rejection of that internationalism. Today, notwithstanding Biden’s pledge “to help lead the world toward a more peaceful, prosperous future for all people,” the reality is that Americans want the benefits of international order without doing the hard work of building and maintaining it.

The hold of this emerging nationalist approach to the world is clear, accounting for the continuity across administrations as different as those of Obama, Trump, and Biden. Whether it can produce a foreign policy that advances American security, prosperity, and values is another matter entirely.

THE SQUANDERING

As with any paradigm shift, the one taking place now is possible only because of the failures—both real and perceived—of much of what came in the years before. The Cold War ended 30 years ago, and the United States emerged from that four-decade struggle with a degree of primacy that had few, if any, historical precedents. U.S. power was immense in both absolute and relative terms. It may have been an exaggeration to hail a “unipolar moment,” but not by much.

Historians who look back on these three decades will be rightly critical of a lot that the United States did, and did not do, with its position. There were some important accomplishments: the reunification of Germany within NATO, the disciplined handling of the 1990–91 Gulf War, the U.S.-led military and diplomatic

effort to help end the war and slaughter in the former Yugoslavia, the fashioning of new trade agreements, the millions of lives saved thanks to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, known as PEPFAR.

But these achievements must be weighed against American failures, both of commission and omission. Washington managed little in the way of relationship and institution building, lacking the creativity and ambition that characterized U.S. foreign policy in the wake of World War II. It wasn't considered much of a stretch when Dean Acheson, who was secretary of state during the Truman administration, titled his memoir *Present at the Creation*; no recent secretary of state could credibly include the word "creation" in his or her memoir. Despite its unmatched power, the United States did little to address the widening gap between global challenges and the institutions meant to contend with them.

The emerging American approach to the world is woefully inadequate and rife with self-defeating contradictions.

The list of missteps is long. Washington largely failed to adapt to China's rise. Its decision to enlarge NATO, in violation of Churchill's dictum "In victory, magnanimity," fanned Russian hostility without sufficiently modernizing or strengthening the alliance. Africa and Latin America received only intermittent, and even then limited, attention. Above all, the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were failures of both design and execution, resulting in costly overreach, part of a broader U.S. focus on the greater Middle East that defied strategic logic. The George W. Bush and Obama administrations dedicated a high percentage of their foreign policy focus to a region home to only about five percent of the world's population, no great powers, and economies dependent on the wasting asset of fossil fuels.

The word that comes to mind in assessing U.S. foreign policy after the Cold War is "squander." The United States missed its best chance to update the system that had successfully waged the Cold War for a new era defined by new challenges and new rivalries. Meanwhile, thanks to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the American public largely soured on what was widely seen as a costly, failed foreign policy. Americans came to blame trade for the disappearance of millions of manufacturing jobs (despite new technologies being the main culprit), and growing inequality, exacerbated by both the 2008 financial crisis and the pandemic, fueled populist suspicion of elites. In the face of looming domestic

problems, including decaying infrastructure and faltering public education, foreign involvement came to be viewed as a costly distraction. The stage for a new foreign policy paradigm was set.

EXTREME COMPETITION

The first and most prominent element of continuity between Trump and Biden is the centrality of great-power rivalry—above all, with China. Indeed, U.S. policy toward China has hardly changed since Biden became president: as Matthew Pottinger, a senior official on the National Security Council during the Trump administration who was the lead architect of that administration’s approach to China, rightly noted in these pages, “The Biden administration has largely maintained its predecessor’s policy.” Biden himself has spoken of “extreme competition” with China, and his coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs has proclaimed that “the period that was broadly described as engagement has come to an end.” This new posture reflects the pervasive disillusionment in the American foreign policy establishment with the results of efforts to integrate China into the world economy and the broader international system, along with heightened concern about how Beijing is using its growing strength abroad and engaging in repression at home.

The continuity between the two administrations can be seen in their approaches to Taiwan, the most likely flash point between the United States and China. Far from rescinding a policy introduced in the final weeks of the Trump administration that removed restrictions on official U.S. interactions with Taiwanese officials, the Biden administration has actively implemented it, publicizing high-level meetings between U.S. officials and their Taiwanese counterparts. Just as the Trump administration worked to improve U.S.-Taiwanese ties, the Biden administration has repeatedly stressed its “rock solid” support for Taiwan and has inserted language emphasizing the importance of cross-strait stability into joint statements not just with Asian allies, such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea, but also with global bodies, such as the G-7.

The continuity goes beyond Taiwan. The Biden administration has kept in place Trump-era tariffs and export controls and is reportedly looking into launching an investigation into China’s large-scale industrial subsidies. It has doubled down on criticism of China’s refusal to allow an independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19 and given credence to the possibility that the new coronavirus leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan, China. Like its predecessor, it has called

Beijing's repression of the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang a "genocide" and denounced its violation of the "one country, two systems" principle in Hong Kong. It has strengthened efforts to upgrade the Quad, a dialogue meant to enhance cooperation among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, and launched a complementary strategic initiative with Australia and the United Kingdom. It has also continued to use the term "Indo-Pacific," first brought into common official usage by the Trump administration.

To be sure, there are differences in the Biden administration's approach in some important areas, including a focus on finding ways to cooperate on climate change, the decision to refrain from echoing the call by Trump's secretary of state Mike Pompeo for regime change in Beijing, and an effort to build a common stance with allies. Yet the view that China is the United States' chief competitor and even adversary has become widespread and ingrained, and the similarities in the two administrations' approaches far outweigh any differences.

Much the same can be said of the administrations' policies toward the United States' other great-power competitor. Since Biden took over, U.S. policy toward Russia has changed little in substance. Gone is Trump's inexplicable admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin. But whatever Trump's personal regard for Putin, the Trump administration's posture toward Russia was in fact fairly tough. It introduced new sanctions, closed Russian consulates in the United States, and enhanced and expanded U.S. military support to Ukraine—all of which has continued under Biden. The common view between the two administrations seems to be that U.S. policy toward Russia should mostly consist of damage limitation—preventing tensions, whether in Europe or in cyberspace, from deteriorating into a crisis. Even Biden's willingness to extend U.S.-Russian arms control pacts and start "strategic stability" talks is mostly about preventing additional erosion, not making further progress. The days of seeking a "reset" with Moscow are long gone.

AMERICAN NATIONALISM

Accompanying this focus on great powers is a shared embrace of American nationalism. The Trump administration eagerly adopted the slogan and idea of "America first," despite the label's origins in a strand of isolationism tinged with sympathy for Nazi Germany. The Biden administration is less overt in its nationalism, but its mantra of "a foreign policy for the middle class" reflects some similar inclinations.

“America first” tendencies also characterized the Biden administration’s initial response to COVID-19. U.S. exports of vaccines were limited and delayed even as domestic supply far exceeded demand, and there has been only a modest effort to expand manufacturing capacity to allow for greater exports. This domestic focus was shortsighted, as highly contagious variants were able to emerge in other parts of the world before coming to do immense damage in the United States. It also forfeited an opportunity to cultivate goodwill internationally by demonstrating the superiority of American technology and generosity in the face of Chinese and Russian vaccine diplomacy.

U.S. trade policy has been shaped by similar forces, demonstrating further continuity between Trump and Biden. The latter has avoided the hyperbole of the former, who savaged all trade pacts except for the ones his own administration had negotiated. (No matter that the Trump administration’s agreements were mostly updated versions of existing pacts: the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, for example, largely followed the much-denounced North American Free Trade Agreement and, in modernizing certain elements, made generous use of the text of the equally denounced TPP.) But the Biden administration has shown little, if any, interest in strengthening the World Trade Organization, negotiating new trade accords, or joining existing ones, including the successor agreement to the TPP, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, despite the overwhelming economic and strategic reasons for doing so. Staying outside the agreement leaves the United States on the sidelines of the Indo-Pacific economic order and also means missing opportunities in other areas, such as advancing global climate goals through cross-border carbon taxes or using the deal to provide an economic counterweight to China.

WITHDRAWAL AT ANY COST

Central to the new foreign policy is the desire to pull back from the greater Middle East, the venue of the so-called forever wars that did so much to fuel this paradigm shift in U.S. foreign policy. Afghanistan is the most striking example of this shared impetus. In February 2020, the Trump administration signed an accord with the Taliban that set a May 1, 2021, deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country. The negotiations cut out and undercut the government of Afghanistan, and the agreement itself failed to call for the Taliban

to lay down their arms or even to commit to a cease-fire. It was not so much a peace agreement as a pact to facilitate American military withdrawal.

By the time Biden assumed the presidency, the overreach that had once characterized U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was a thing of the past. U.S. troop levels, which had hit 100,000 during the Obama administration, were down to under 3,000, with their role largely limited to training, advising, and supporting Afghan forces. U.S. combat fatalities had plummeted with the end of combat operations in 2014 (years before the U.S.-Taliban accord). The modest U.S. presence provided an anchor for some 7,000 troops from allied countries (and an even larger number of contractors) and a psychological and military backstop for the Afghan government—a sufficient presence, that is, to avert Kabul’s collapse, but not enough to achieve victory or peace. After 20 years, the United States seemed to have found a level of commitment in Afghanistan commensurate with the stakes.

Americans want the benefits of international order without doing the hard work of building and maintaining it.

Yet the Biden administration rejected the options of renegotiating or scrapping the accord. Instead, it honored Trump’s agreement in every way but one: the deadline for a full U.S. military withdrawal was extended by some 100 days, to September 11, 2021 (and then the withdrawal was completed ahead of schedule). Biden rejected tying the removal of U.S. troops to conditions on the ground or to additional Taliban actions. Like Trump before him, he considered the war in Afghanistan a “forever war,” one he was determined to get out of at any cost. And Biden didn’t just implement the Trump policy he had inherited; his administration did so in a Trumpian way, consulting minimally with others and leaving NATO allies to scramble. (Other decisions, including supplanting French sales of submarines to Australia or being slow to lift COVID-related restrictions against European visitors to the United States, have likewise set back transatlantic ties.) Multilateralism and an alliance-first foreign policy in principle gave way to America-first unilateralism in practice.

In the rest of the greater Middle East, the Biden administration has similarly continued the Trump approach of reducing the U.S. footprint. It has resisted any temptation to get more involved in Syria, much less Libya or Yemen; announced it will maintain only a small, noncombat military presence in Iraq; embraced the

Abraham Accords while participating only reluctantly in diplomatic efforts to end the fighting between Israel and Hamas; and eschewed launching any new attempt to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

At first glance, Iran may seem like a glaring exception to the broader similarity. Trump was a fierce critic of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran (negotiated when Biden was vice president) and unilaterally exited the accord in 2018; by contrast, the Biden administration (which is staffed at the senior level by several officials who had a large hand in negotiating the pact) has made clear its desire to return to the agreement. But restoring the deal has proved easier said than done, as the two governments have been unable to agree on either specific obligations or sequencing. In addition, a new hard-line Iranian government has shown no interest in signing on to the sort of “longer and stronger” pact the Biden administration seeks. As a result, the Biden administration may well face the same choices its predecessor did, with Iran advancing its nuclear and missile capabilities and its influence throughout the region. Even if Iran once again accepts time-limited constraints on its nuclear activities, the United States will still have to decide how to respond to other Iranian provocations.

QUESTIONS OF VALUE

Even on those issues on which Biden’s rhetoric starkly differs from Trump’s, the policy shifts have been more modest than might have been expected. Consider the two presidents’ views on the role of values in foreign policy. Trump was a transactional leader who often seemed to consider democracy a hindrance and tried to establish close personal relationships with many of the world’s dictators. He lavished praise on Putin and exchanged “love letters” with North Korea’s Kim Jong Un. He spoke highly of China’s Xi Jinping, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Hungary’s Viktor Orban, while denigrating the leaders of democratic allies, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He even levied tariffs on Canada and the European Union.

Biden, by contrast, has declared that the United States is in “a contest with autocrats,” announced plans to hold his Summit for Democracy, and pledged to prioritize relations with countries that share American values. Yet such commitments, however sincere, have hardly made human rights and democracy promotion a more prominent part of U.S. foreign policy. Well-warranted expressions of outrage have not led to significant changes in behavior by others;

the targets of such outrage are generally willing and able to absorb U.S. criticism and increasingly even U.S. sanctions, thanks to the growth of alternative sources of support. Myanmar in the wake of a military coup is a textbook example: the United States sanctioned members of the regime, but Chinese largess and diplomatic support have helped the military weather the sanctions. Washington has offered only a minimal response to incidents such as the Cuban government's brutal reaction to protests last summer or the assassination of Haiti's president. Whatever concerns Washington may have about Saudi human rights violations, it's unlikely that those concerns would prevent cooperation with Riyadh on Iran, Yemen, or Israel if, for example, Saudi Arabia's leaders showed an interest in joining the Abraham Accords.

Of course, U.S. presidents have always allowed professed commitments to human rights and democracy to be set aside when other interests or priorities have come to the fore. The "free world" of the Cold War was often anything but free. But the broader shift in U.S. foreign policy today, with its stress on both great-power competition and short-term domestic priorities, has made those tradeoffs more frequent and acute. In China's neighborhood, for example, the Biden administration set aside concerns about human rights violations by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in order to make it easier for the U.S. military to operate in his country, and it has worked to bolster ties with Vietnam, another autocracy ruled by a communist party. With Russia, it signed an arms control accord while overlooking the imprisonment of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny. It has largely ignored the rise of Hindu nationalism in India in favor of stronger ties with the country to balance China.

With its poorly executed withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the abandonment of many Afghans most vulnerable to Taliban reprisals, Washington further forfeited the high ground: the United States walked away from a project that, for all its flaws and failings, had done much to improve the lives of millions of Afghans, above all women and girls. And of course, the sad reality of the fragile state of democracy in the United States—particularly in the wake of the January 6 insurrection—has further undercut Washington's ability to promote democratic values abroad.

None of this is to say that there are not important areas of difference between the Trump administration and the Biden administration on foreign policy—consider climate change, for example: climate denial has given way to new investments in

green technology and infrastructure, the regulation of fossil fuel production and use, and participation in the Paris process. But these areas of difference have rarely taken priority when other issues, many of which reflect more continuity, are at stake. Washington has been unwilling to use trade to advance climate goals, sanction Brazil for its destruction of the Amazon, or make meaningful contributions to help poorer countries shift to green energy.

THE PROBLEM WITH CONTINUITY

In theory, more continuity in U.S. foreign policy should be a good thing. After all, a great power is unlikely to be effective if its foreign policy lurches from administration to administration in a way that unnerves allies, provides openings to adversaries, confuses voters, and makes impossible any long-term commitment to building global norms and institutions. The problem with the emerging American approach to the world is not an absence of domestic political consensus; to the contrary, there is considerable bipartisanship when it comes to foreign policy. The problem is that the consensus is woefully inadequate, above all in its failure to appreciate just how much developments thousands of miles away affect what happens at home.

It is also rife with self-defeating contradictions, especially when it comes to China. Deterring China will require sustained increases in military spending and a greater willingness to use force (since successful deterrence always requires not just the ability but also the perceived will to act). Many Republicans but few Democrats back the former; few in either party seem ready to sign up for the latter. Both parties favor symbolically upgrading U.S.-Taiwanese relations, even though going too far in that direction has the potential to trigger a costly conflict between the United States and China. As much as the United States sees China as an adversary, Washington still needs Beijing's support if it is to tackle a host of regional and global challenges, from North Korea and Afghanistan to global health. And while the Biden administration has talked much about its support for alliances, U.S. allies are in many cases unprepared to do what the administration believes is necessary to counter China. Indeed, when it comes to both China and Russia, most U.S. allies resist U.S. calls to limit trade and investment ties in sensitive sectors for geopolitical reasons. A posture does not a policy make.

Greater disarray in the world will make it much more difficult to “build back better.”

Competing with China is essential, but it cannot provide the organizing principle for American foreign policy in an era increasingly defined by global challenges, including climate change, pandemic disease, terrorism, proliferation, and online disruption, all of which carry enormous human and economic costs. Imagine that the United States successfully deters China from using aggression against its neighbors, from Taiwan to India and Japan, and in the South China Sea. Better yet, imagine that China even stops stealing U.S. intellectual property and addresses U.S. concerns about its trade practices. Beijing could still frustrate U.S. efforts to tackle global challenges by supporting Iranian and North Korean nuclear ambitions, conducting aggressive cyberattacks, building more coal-fired power plants, and resisting reforms to the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization.

The contradictions go on. The war in Afghanistan revealed limits to Americans' support for nation building, but building up the capacity of friends is essential in much of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East if the governments in those regions are to become better able to meet local security challenges, a prerequisite for their becoming more democratic and for the United States' shouldering less of the burden. Participation in trade blocs is desirable not just for economic reasons but also to help rein in China's unfair trade practices and mitigate climate change. Economic nationalism (especially "Buy America" provisions) sets a precedent that, if others follow, will reduce global trade and work against collaborative approaches to developing and fielding new technologies that could make it easier to compete with China. And in the Middle East, for all the focus on limiting U.S. involvement, it is not clear how pulling back squares with U.S. commitments to counter an Iran intent on developing its nuclear and missile capabilities and on expanding its regional influence, both directly and through proxies. Even a successful effort to revive the 2015 nuclear deal would not change this reality, given what the agreement does not address and given the sunset provisions for its nuclear restrictions.

AMERICA ALONE

Whatever the failings of this new paradigm, there is no going back; history does not offer do-overs. Nor should Washington return to a foreign policy that, for much of three decades, largely failed both in what it did and in what it did not do.

The starting point for a new internationalism should be a clear recognition that although foreign policy begins at home, it cannot end there. The United States,

regardless of its diminished influence and deep domestic divisions, faces a world with both traditional geopolitical threats and new challenges tied to globalization. An American president must seek to fix what ails the United States without neglecting what happens abroad. Greater disarray in the world will make the task to “build back better”—or whatever slogan is chosen for domestic renewal—much more difficult, if not impossible. Biden has acknowledged the “fundamental truth of the 21st century . . . that our own success is bound up with others succeeding as well”; the question is whether he can craft and carry out a foreign policy that reflects it.

The United States also cannot succeed alone. It must work with others, through both formal and informal means, to set international norms and standards and marshal collective action. Such an approach will require the involvement of traditional allies in Europe and Asia, new partners, countries that may need U.S. or international help at home, and nondemocracies. It will require the use of all the instruments of power available to the United States—diplomacy, but also trade, aid, intelligence, and the military. Nor can the United States risk letting unpredictability give it a reputation as unreliable; other states will determine their own actions, especially when it comes to balancing or accommodating China, based in no small part on how dependable and active they believe the United States will be as a partner.

In the absence of a new American internationalism, the likely outcome will be a world that is less free, more violent, and less willing or able to tackle common challenges. It is equal parts ironic and dangerous that at a time when the United States is more affected by global developments than ever before, it is less willing to carry out a foreign policy that attempts to shape them.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

Does Anyone Understand the US-Taliban deal? By Imran Jan

The United States, under President Trump, signed a peace deal with the Taliban, bringing an end to America's as well as Afghanistan's longest war. The essence of the deal is that the US would end the occupation of Afghanistan in return for the Taliban to provide the guarantee that they wouldn't allow their land to be used by any foreign terrorist group. What does that accomplish?

If this was a face-saving deal to get out of Afghanistan so as to appear to be squeezing a sweet deal out of the Taliban then I get it. If this was a serious American demand, however, then it defies logic because for terrorist attacks to happen successfully some kind of land anywhere is not necessary. When 9/11 happened, 'why do they hate us?' was disingenuous, yet the key question asked. Why the terrorists had access to land in Afghanistan would have been ludicrous to ask. And still is.

Nine-eleven became possible due to ideological and logistical reasons, none of which were facilitated by the land in Afghanistan. Speaking of ideological reasons, Jihad was supported and nurtured by the West to counter the communist strongmen worldwide. The Takfiri Jihadists after emerging triumphant by defeating the Soviet Union became disillusioned with their stinger and cash provider. Lawrence Wright says rightly in his book *The Looming Tower* that there was a time after the end of Jihad in Afghanistan when Bin Laden had considered living a peaceful life devoid of violent Jihad. He had settled in Sudan where he was presiding over a conglomerate of various businesses.

Enter Saddam Hussein. He invaded Kuwait. The Saudis feared being next. Bin Laden offered his country's rulers a plan to repel Saddam should he dare bring his military hardware near Saudi Arabia's borders. Bin Laden sold the idea of using his battle-hardened Mujahideen. The Saudi throne dismissed his idea and invited the Americans instead. Bin Laden was fiercely against bringing the infidel forces to the Holy land of Islam.

After defeating Saddam, the American forces remained in Saudi Arabia, confirming the suspicions of many. Bin Laden and his Jihadist followers felt

humiliated. The urge for Jihad against America became strong. Al Qaeda as a terrorist organisation was born during those days, writes Wright.

Furthermore, the support for Israel and the Middle Eastern dictators angered many young Arabs. A society where joblessness and lack of entertainment were the omnipresent realities of life, these young men looked for a cause to adhere to. The American foreign policy presented itself as an attractive target for that anger.

Logistically, 9/11 became possible not because Al Qaeda had made a flawless plan. It was almost amateurish. The CIA actually knew about the terrorist plot long before Sept 11, 2001. Two of the terrorists — Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar — had arrived in Los Angeles in January 2000. The CIA had been tracking them and their co-members from before their arrival into the US, but it kept quiet so as to gather more intelligence. The Alec Station at the CIA jealously guarded the intelligence it had collected and blocked the FBI from accessing it. It kept a firewall preventing the FBI and one John O' Neil from getting an air of the intelligence they had. Well, the CIA didn't get to the big fish, but the big wedding did happen.

Realistically speaking, having access to land doesn't matter. Terrorist attacks against America in future wouldn't mean the terrorists having access to some land. It would mean a continuation of the aggressive and hegemonic foreign policy. No terrorist attacks wouldn't mean no access to land for the terrorists but rather a non-aggressive and wise foreign policy. It would also mean a mature intelligence agency behaviour.

Just like terrorists don't have a nationality, they don't have to have the land either.

Published in The Express Tribune, November 4th, 2021.

US-India Strategic Partnership By Naveed Aman Khan

THE US-India Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) has underperformed its goals.

Indian interlocutors suggested that the United States has viewed DTTI as a way to sell hardware by bypassing India's cumbersome defence acquisition process, whereas India views DTTI as a way to access privileged US technology.

This mismatch in expectations has hamstrung collaboration. American interlocutors suggested that the focus of DTTI should move away from big-ticket items to co-development of smaller platforms and nascent technologies where both sides genuinely seek collaboration.

This can build India's indigenous defence technology ecosystem and absorptive capacity, though more slowly than India would like. This has already begun, with cooperation on air-launched swarming drones.

An increase in private sector involvement and introduction of higher thresholds for FDI are two recent changes in the Indian defence industry that could reinvigorate US-India defence cooperation.

Even if defence sales slow, American participants suggested, the United States and India could concentrate on greater maritime collaboration and intelligence sharing.

Indian participants suggested that although high-level reforms such as the long-delayed institution of a tri-service Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and Department of Military Affairs had taken place, these are likely to prove disruptive rather than generate the expected changes to defence restructuring amid heightened nationalism and the ongoing border crisis with China.

The civilian bureaucracy's long-term planning remains constrained by departmental divisions, inadequate coordination, inexperienced or non-expert political appointees, and the absence of a common understanding of India's

strategic goals exacerbated by a lack of apex strategy documents like a National Security Strategy or National Military Strategy.

The United States has expressed particular concern regarding new streams of arms like the S-400 air defence system, because they fuel Russian power, diminish prospects for interoperability and secure communications between US and Indian forces, and preclude sharing of existing sensitive weapons technologies.

They also restrict Indo-US co-development of new technologies, which would likely be exposed to Russian technician observation, or espionage.

The United States refuses to countenance the transfer of certain high-end items like nuclear submarines to India, offers non-competitive or inflated prices like air defence systems and is only in the nascent stages of enabling co-production.

Despite clear convergence on the challenge and threat posed by China, both Indian and American interlocutors remain concerned that potential US.

post-election political turbulence and greater focus on America's domestic challenges could result in incrementalism or drift in US-India cooperation.

Uncertainty over US political turbulence and domestic priorities may motivate Indian hedging until the next administration demonstrates national cohesion and clarifies foreign policy direction.

The very careful, anodyne statements made at the October 6, 2020 Quadrilateral ministerial meeting might presage some equivocation, both from India but also other US allies, until a more cohesive US strategic establishment charts a clear course.

Trepidation over the United States' direction over the next couple of years is compounded by the surprising, resignation of Japanese PM Shinzo Abe that has likewise introduced new uncertainty into the Indo-Pacific equation.

Biden Administration could rebalance some priorities in the bilateral relationship beyond the defence portfolio

Despite expected consistency in the US approach to China, Indian participants anticipated greater US scrutiny of Kashmir and other matters that India considers its internal affairs, suspected a diminished commitment to the Quad and feared reprised efforts towards a G-2 arrangement with China.

Participants from both countries recognized a new administration's differential approach to other areas namely Russia, the Middle East, and counterterrorism might have second-order effects on the US-India relationship.

These might not all track in the same direction, however, and could presage more hostility towards Russia, less towards Iran, and diminished appetite for counterterrorism or overseas commitments especially in Afghanistan.

Implicit in some of the Indian concerns was an expectation of policy reversal with a new party in the executive.

Though this fear belies two decades of durable, bipartisan support for US-India ties, it suggests recognition of some of the recent politicization of the relationship along with broader concerns about American political stability.

Both sides concurred the bilateral relationship does not hinge on election outcomes in either country. India-US ties have consistent bipartisan support in the United States and increasingly firm backing across the Indian political spectrum.

Seven years after essentially blocking a military arrangement between the United States and Maldives, India welcomed one in September 2020, along with the announcement of a US there.

India's China challenge, regional and global aspirations and increasing role in multilateral fora and a growing acceptance of and reliance on US cooperation in these spheres all but ensure the two countries will continue to find convergence in the long-term.

—The writer, based in Islamabad, is book ambassador, columnist and author of several books.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

India's Collapse in the Indo-Pacific By Saad Rasool

The Cold War between China and the United States is being 'fought' at multiple fronts—in the South China Sea, in Afghanistan and Central Asia, in parts of the Middle East, in eastern Europe, across the Pacific, and in various 'economic theatres' (i.e. trade war). But the 'warmest' front of this Cold War, however, remains the stand-off between India and China—which has resulted in the loss of more than 1,000 Km/Sq of Indian land.

Clearly, India has no response to China in Ladakh. Or in Sikkim. Or Arunachal Pradesh. The shutting down of a few dozen apps (e.g. TikTok) and restrictions on Chinese companies cannot be considered a commensurate response to loss of actual land area, and the death of uniformed soldiers.

So, what 'real' options does India have against China? Well, the answer (sadly for India) is hard to ascertain. Can India opt to reclaim its territory through conventional war? No; China is far superior in its military and technological capabilities. Can India negotiate a return of its land? Does not seem likely; even after dozens of rounds of talk, there has been no meaningful breakthrough. Can India call its 'allies' to its military aid? Not really; if it could, it would have done so by now. Can India participate in the Pacific theatres to cause troubles for China? No; India is having trouble holding on to its own territory and waters. Dabbling in the Pacific seems like empty rhetoric of an ill-found 'Indo-Pacific' strategy.

So, what can India do? The most plausible option, if India can muster the courage for it, is to choke the Malacca Straits, which forms a critical bottleneck in China's oil supply and trade routes. Will India be foolish enough to do this, thereby tempting further aggression from China? Unlikely.

Cognisant of the risks in Malacca Straits, China has already started to look for alternative routes; some other way to access the Indian Ocean for trade and oil supply lines. This, for now, includes two options: 1) CPEC, through Pakistan, which forms the most convenient access route to the Indian Ocean; and 2) The Thai Canal, cutting through Thailand's Kra Isthmus, the narrowest point of the Malay peninsula, which would open a second sea route from China to the Indian

Ocean. This Thai Canal, or Kra Canal, would allow the Chinese navy to quickly move ships between its newly constructed bases in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, sidestepping more than 700 miles around Malaysia, through the Malacca Strait. And for this, China has offered Thailand up to \$30 billion to dig the canal.

These two routes, once functional, would kill the (already dying) Indo-Pacific dreams of curtailing China and its Belt and Road Initiative in the region. By extension, it would also serve as a final nail in the Indian coffin of portraying itself as a counterweight to China in this region.

The ill-conceived idea of 'Indo-Pacific', built upon India's promise to counter China in this region, dates back to 2018. Specifically, on May 30, 2018, the United States Defence Secretary of the time (Jim Mattis) announced that Pentagon's Pacific Command was being renamed as the 'Indo-Pacific Command', giving India a larger role in the Pacific theatre, in pursuit of containing and countering China. This was a significant policy shift in Washington. It symbolised that Delhi had convinced the Pentagon that it could serve as a counterweight to China in the Pacific theatre, while also destabilising China's economic interest across the region—particularly, the CPEC project.

At the time, no one knew whether India would deliver on its promise. Could it really act as a counterweight to China in this region? Would it be able to help the United States 'contain' China, and its growing power? India certainly claimed that it could. That was the very reason for its de-linking with South Asia, and introduction in the Pacific theatre.

However, the 18-months have exposed India's bluff. As China infiltrated through the borders of Indian-held Ladakh, claiming important vantage points in Pangong Lake and the Galwan Valley, there has been no real resistance or counter from India. Not even a peep. In fact, the one time that India tried some adventurism, it lost 20 of its soldiers, without winning an inch of land back from China.

According to available reports (including those from India), the Chinese walked into Ladakh with virtually no resistance from the Indian Army, and since then have refused to entertain discussion on returning the territory. Not just that, emboldened by Chinese actions, Nepal also claimed territory within the Indian boundary, and the Eastern areas of Nagaland et al are also shunning the grip of

the Indian State. Bangladesh has signed commitments with China for inclusion in the BRI. Sri Lanka has leased its Colombo port to China. Myanmar is being supported by China. Iran has signed a long-term strategic deal with China. The Taliban are in conversation with China about the rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan. And China has continued to expand its influence (and military presence) across the Indian Ocean (including Gwadar), with no real challenge or interference from India.

All attempts by India to involve its coalition partners from the Quad (i.e. United States, Australia, and Japan) have fallen on deaf ears. Except for a few token statements by the Australian Prime Minister, Japan and Australia do not seem to have any desire to enter into a conflict with China or its growing influence across the region.

So, in the circumstances, what happened to the whole idea of Indo-Pacific? Serious policy circles, in Washington and across the globe, are asking what benefit can India provide in the Pacific (against the Chinese) if they cannot even retrieve their own (claimed) territory from China? If its forces cannot face the Chinese military in Ladakh, can India really be expected to send warships to the South China Sea? Or into the deep blue waters of the Indian Ocean? Can it curtail or hinder the CPEC route, when it is having trouble keeping the Chinese at bay in Sikkim?

And if India cannot stand up to China—especially now, when the United States needs it the most—what is the purpose of having an ‘Indo’ Pacific strategy? Isn’t India merely a liability for the United States? Not only can it not counter China, it may help destroy the myth of powerful Western alliances in the region.

India’s bluff has been called. And without firing so much as one bullet, China has put India back in the box that it belongs: a developing nation in South Asia. Not a regional power in the Indo-Pacific.

This collapse of the Indo-Pacific dream is a staggering loss of face for India on the international stage. And coupled with recent developments in Afghanistan, India might find itself back where it started: as Pakistan’s jingoistic neighbour, who is at daggers drawn with the new global power in this region.

Source: Published in The Nation

Refocus on Iran By Dr James Zogby

Once again, gallons of ink are being spilled on articles arguing for and against US efforts to secure a new nuclear weapons pact with Iran. Will Iran return to the talks? Will the US agree to Iranian terms (and vice versa)? And at this point, do the Iranians even want a deal? While at times interesting, the entire discussion is focused on an issue that I feel is a dangerous diversion. Similar to my thoughts during the negotiations that led to the JCPOA, I find myself asking again why we are expending so much political capital, imposing so many sanctions, and involving so many important countries to address a problem that doesn't exist, while doing nothing to address real problems plaguing the region. The simple fact is that Iran doesn't have a nuclear bomb and, as difficult as it may be for some to accept, even if it did have one, it could never use it. Meanwhile, the real problem posed by Iran is the meddlesome role it's playing across the region. Let's look more closely at both of these matters.

First, Iran has no bomb and even if it did it could not use it for two reasons. In the age of "mutually assured destruction," Iran's use of a nuclear warhead would result in its becoming a radioactive parking lot within minutes. Even if it were not flattened by a counterattack, its use of such a horrible weapon would ensure not only worldwide condemnation, but also repercussions that would mark the end of the Islamic Republic. Further, Iran could never use a nuclear bomb because of the consequences of the explosion's fallout. If it bombed Israel, radioactivity (depending on the direction the wind was blowing) would also take countless Palestinian, Jordanian, and Lebanese lives and possibly many others as well. And if Iran were to use a nuclear bomb across the Gulf, the impact would devastate the entire region, including Iran itself.

For these same reasons, Israel, despite reportedly possessing hundreds of nuclear warheads, has never used them in any of its many wars with its Arab neighbours, nor can it use them in the future. The same is true for India, Pakistan, and North Korea. Given this, the only apparent reason for possessing such a weapon is the bragging rights. In reality, our obsessive preoccupation with Iran's "programme" is giving it more attention and bragging rights than Iran would ever get from actually having a bomb it couldn't use. Iran sits centrestage with all of the world's powers meeting with and cajoling its leaders. It's exactly the type of

attention “bad boys” crave and we’re giving it to them, while not paying attention to the really dangerous things Iran is doing across the region.

Ironically, it was Israel who pushed the Iranian “nuclear threat” to the front burner. When the Obama administration took the bait and negotiated the “nuclear deal,” Israel then led the charge against the deal. There are two reasons for this: First, Israel and Iran need each other as foils. Second, their intended audience is the Arab World that lies between them. When Israel was bombing Lebanon, Iran was able to play to the Arab masses saying: “Look at what Israel’s doing and only our ally, Hezbollah, is standing against them and the US.” As a result, a little more than a decade ago, Iran and Hezbollah had extraordinarily high favourable ratings in most Arab countries. But during the past decade, as Iran’s machinations in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have become increasingly clear, Iran’s ratings plummeted across the region and some Arabs came to see Israel as a possible source of support against the Islamic Republic’s meddlesome behaviour.

It was for this reason that I could never understand why so much effort was expended on stopping Iran’s nuclear programme while ignoring its regional role. These are exactly the issues we should be addressing.

At home, Iran has problems on all sides that must be addressed, facing unrest with their substantial Azeri population in the north and their Arab citizens in the Ahwaz region. Iran also faces the renewed threat from the unsettling situation resulting from the Taliban victory in Afghanistan. And, if that were not enough, young Iranians in major cities continue to demand more jobs and personal freedoms. These are the issues that need to be on the table. Rather than focusing on a bomb that doesn’t exist, we should direct diplomacy and apply economic pressure on efforts to make Iran see the benefits of becoming responsible citizens in the Gulf and Arab East. Such an effort might not yield immediate results or even work at all. But it would at least be focused on the right issues.

Afghan FM-led delegation to visit Pakistan tomorrow
Dr. James J. Zogby

The writer is the President of Arab American Institute.
Source: Published in The Nation

Global Order in the 21st Century By Atique

Ur Rehman

Since the origin of international relations as a discipline a hundred years ago, the debate has been revolving around two opposite paradigms; liberalism and realism. Realism suggests that, in an anarchic world, the security of a nation state is the responsibility of no one else but the state itself. Liberalism promotes cooperation among states to avoid wars. In broader concepts of security in domestic affairs, economy and politics fall under security but at the global level these are two separate things. A political alliance among nations may not necessarily be covering trade; similarly a joint economic venture may not be focusing on military security. If we broadly look at the existing structure of the twenty-first-century world order, it is evident that global political and economic institutions do not have common goals. The role of international economic institutions like the IMF and the World Bank also need a comprehensive review. The present world order was formed after the end of World War II. The world changed from multipolar to bipolar. The US and USSR took charge of global leadership.

America maintained the global order on alliances under the military umbrella and the USSR mostly countered the alliances through alliances or other means and pursued its interest vigorously where needed. A bipolar world gave rise to the cold war and clandestine operations from both sides. After the disintegration of the USSR in 1989, the US emerged as the sole superpower. This contradictory approach of the US—attaining political dominance and hegemony on the global economy has been a major factor for disorder in the world. The US' unipolar moment began to erode after its 2003 invasion of Iraq. Since then, power has pivoted towards the Eurasian heartland and rimland. The emergence of China, an indignant and self-assured Russia, a defiant North Korea, a challenging Iran, an unceremonious withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan and many other global challenges including the energy crisis, climate hazard, a troubled environment in the South-China sea are no longer favourable to the existing global order.

The pandemic has further stressed the order by draining governments, dividing societies, intensifying tensions between the United States and China, and exhibited a noticeable gap between problems being faced by the world and the

ability of the world to address these challenges through existing international institutions. The international order thus faces a paradox. Despite political reasons, the structural issues are a big impediment for its prosperity. The success of existing structure is dependent on the success of globalisation, but the process produces a political reaction that often works counter to its aspirations. The most important aspect of the new world order will be the positioning of China. At no time in history has any nation brought so many people out of poverty as quickly as has China. It will soon be the world's largest economy and the second largest military power. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further added complexity to the emerging order. The US and its allies view the project as a threat to their global influence. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a bilateral arrangement between two time-tested friends, is the flagship programme of BRI.

The US has come up with a project in cooperation with its allies, G7 countries, which they have termed 'Build Back Better World (B3W)'. B3W is a retaliatory approach. The old order is in flux while the shape of the replacement is highly uncertain. Reconstruction of the international system is the ultimate challenge for the US and other powers.

To play a responsible role in the evolution of a twenty-first-century world order, the United States, China and Russia must be prepared to answer a number of questions, particularly, what do they desire to achieve or prevent for themselves and for the world? China needs to move patiently in line with the global pace. Abrupt and phenomenal successes create panic for adversaries. India needs to adopt a rational approach, leaving behind the practices of lies, deceit and propaganda against other nations. India is the main destabilising force in South Asia. The goal of this era must be to achieve that equilibrium while restraining the proponents of war. Pakistan has paid a heavy price in the global war against terrorism during the last two decades. Pakistan needs its due share in global prosperity. The new world order must be focused on shared prosperity, cooperation and the well being of all states, not a few rich and powerful states.

Source: Published in The Nation

NATO Arms Sales to Ukraine: The Spark

That Starts a War With Russia? By Ted

Galen Carpenter

The United States and its NATO allies are busily arming Ukraine and engaging in other actions that encourage the leaders in Kiev to believe that they have strong Western backing in their confrontation with Russia and Russian-backed separatists. The conflict between the Ukrainian government and separatist forces in the Donbass region, which has remained at a low simmer in recent years, thanks to the fragile Minsk agreements, shows unmistakable signs of heating up. That development is exacerbating already dangerous tensions between Kiev and Moscow. There is growing speculation that Russia might even launch an invasion of Ukraine.

Western leaders are pursuing a reckless strategy that is generating increasingly pointed warnings from Kremlin officials. On two occasions since early April, Russia also has made ominous military deployments near its border with Ukraine. Shortly before the earlier episode, the Biden administration had announced a new \$125 million arms sale to Ukraine. Although the transaction was put on hold temporarily in June, \$60 million of that package was delivered during U.S. secretary of defense Lloyd Austin's visit to Kiev in late October.

The United States is not the only NATO member that has made destabilizing arms sales to Ukraine. Turkey is equipping the Ukrainian military with drones, and in late October, Kiev's forces launched a drone attack that destroyed rebel artillery batteries in the Donbas. Moscow issued strong protests about the escalation to both Ukraine and Turkey. A new deployment of Russian forces near the Ukrainian border also followed, and U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken expressed concern that Russia might execute a "rehash" of its 2014 military offensive when Vladimir Putin's government seized Crimea and then provided military support for secessionists in eastern Ukraine.

Arms sales are only one component of the growing support for Kiev on the part of the United States and some of its NATO allies. President Joe Biden has repeatedly expressed Washington's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and

territorial integrity against “Russian aggression.” U.S. and Ukrainian troops have conducted joint military exercises (war games) on several occasions, and Ukraine’s forces have been included in NATO’s military exercises. Indeed, Ukraine hosted the latest version of those maneuvers in September 2021. In response to Washington’s pressure, Ukraine is being treated as a NATO member in all but name.

Such actions are needlessly destabilizing. Ukraine’s leaders, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, already are making jingoistic statements about regaining Crimea and crushing the separatists in Donbass. The country’s official defense strategy document adopted in March 2021 explicitly includes those goals.

Logically, such boasts are without substance; Ukraine’s military forces are no match for Russia’s in terms of either quantity or quality. However, a belief in U.S. or NATO military support may cause Ukrainian leaders to abandon prudence and mount an ill-starred confrontation. Once before, the United States led an overly eager client to assume that it had Washington’s backing, and the result was a needless war in which the client emerged bruised and humiliated.

George W. Bush’s administration foolishly encouraged Georgia’s President Mikheil Saakashvili to believe that his country was an important U.S. ally, and that the United States and NATO would come to Georgia’s rescue if it became embroiled in a conflict with Russia. Washington provided millions of dollars in weaponry to Tbilisi and even trained Georgian troops. Bush also had pushed U.S. NATO allies to give Georgia (and Ukraine) membership in the alliance, albeit unsuccessfully.

In August 2008, Saakashvili launched a military offensive to regain control of South Ossetia (one of two secessionist regions). The Georgian offensive inflicted casualties on Russian peacekeeping troops that were deployed there since the early 1990s, and Moscow responded with a full-scale counteroffensive that soon led to the occupation of several Georgian cities and brought Russian troops to the outskirts of the capital. Despite Washington’s previous supportive rhetoric, Saakashvili discovered that the United States was not willing to fight a war on Georgia’s behalf, and he had to sign a peace accord on Russia’s terms.

The parallels between that fiasco and current Western, especially U.S., policy regarding Ukraine are alarming. Washington’s arms sales especially are helping

to create a dangerous situation involving Ukraine. President Barack Obama apparently understood the potential for such sales to provoke Russia and trigger an armed conflict. He declined to implement the transfer of arms to Kiev, despite congressional legislation authorizing that step.

Unfortunately, Obama's successors were not as wise or as cautious. Despite the pervasive canard that Donald Trump was soft on Russia, his administration executed multiple arms sales to Ukraine. In both 2017 and 2019, those packages even included sophisticated Javelin anti-tank missiles, over Moscow's vehement protests. Similar generous arms sales have continued under Biden.

Washington and its NATO partners need to back away from their increasingly dangerous policies. The Kremlin has made it clear multiple times that it regards Ukraine as a core Russian security concern, and that efforts to make that country a Western military ally risk crossing a bright red line. Adopting measures that encourage a volatile client to engage in provocations that it can't sustain if its stronger adversary responds by escalating the confrontation is egregious foreign policy malpractice. Arming Ukraine with sophisticated weaponry is a textbook example of such folly. The United States, Turkey, and Kiev's other enablers need to change course before they turn the simmering Ukraine conflict into a conflagration.

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But it was not to be. The 57-member organisation pledged to establish a fund to assist Afghanistan in what is being called one of the worst humanitarian crises to hit any country in decades. The organisation has also decided to work with the United Nations for release of Afghanistan's assets worth about \$10 billion from international banks, which had been frozen on the advice of the US. The 31-point OIC resolution, however, was short on specifics and gave no figure for financial assistance to Afghanistan.

Who Will Win Asia-Pacific Leaders? Biden or Xi?

U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping are expected to address leaders of the Pacific Rim late on Friday amid heightened regional trade and geopolitical tensions.

China set the tone for the 21 member Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting this week, with Xi warning in a video recording on Thursday that the region must not return to the tensions of the Cold War era.

The comment was seen as a reference to efforts by the United States and its regional allies to blunt what they see as China's growing coercive economic and military influence.

Biden is expected to address the gathering that begins midnight New Zealand time, the White House confirmed in a statement, adding he will discuss ongoing efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and support global economic recovery.

Read more: [Chinese President Xi warns against Cold War in Asia-Pacific](#)

"The President's participation demonstrates U.S. commitment to the Indo-Pacific region and to multilateral cooperation," the statement said.

Chinese foreign ministry has also confirmed that Xi will speak at the meeting via video link.

The APEC gathering comes ahead of a much-anticipated virtual summit between Biden and Xi on Monday, as the super powers look to prevent growing tensions between the world's two biggest economies from spiralling toward conflict.

APEC is the last multi-lateral meeting of the year and comes after a flurry of gatherings including the high-profile G20 summit in Rome and the COP26 climate meeting in Glasgow, Scotland.

APEC in 2021 was hosted entirely online due to host New Zealand's hardline pandemic control measures that have kept its borders closed to almost all travellers for 18 months.

New Zealand has emphasised APEC support for fighting COVID-19, decarbonising economies and growing sustainably.

APEC members pledged at a special meeting called by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in June to expand sharing and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and lift trade barriers for medicines.

APEC will be held in Thailand next year.

Read more: [China willing to work with U.S. on condition of 'mutual respect'](#)

The United States has offered to host the 2023 round of APEC meetings for the first time in over a decade, although a consensus has not been reached on this proposal, officials have said.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Canadian President Justin Trudeau are also expected to speak at the meeting.

Source: Published in Global Village Space

Iran-US Nuclear Talks By Dr Muhammad Akram Zaheer

Iran's new president Ibrahim Raisi seeks a diplomatic way to end the sanction regime. At his swearing-in ceremony on August 5, he stated that the crisis in the region must be resolved through intra-regional dialogue. He said, "I extend my hand of friendship and brotherhood to all the countries of the region, especially to our neighbours, and I warmly shake their hands". A few weeks ago, Washington also advised Tehran to turn to the talks quickly on reviving a nuclear deal. In addition, if the President of Iran is genuine in his determination to see the sanctions lifted, that is precisely what's on the table in Vienna. Washington hopes "Tehran seizes the opportunity now to advance a diplomatic solution".

There are many reasons why analysts think that the situation is changing. First is the general course of Sino-US diplomacy. When National Security Adviser Jack Sullivan and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met top Chinese diplomats in Anchorage in March, the tone was bitter and reproachful. On July 26, Under-secretary of State Wendy Sherman struggled to meet with her Chinese counterpart. China advised the USA to change its highly misguided mind-set and dangerous policy of thinking China was an imaginary enemy. Before her arrival Mr Wang said that China would not accept the USA's superior position in the relationship. A few weeks later, the same senior official of China also met the Taliban leadership. China's "wolf warrior" diplomacy is crystal clear because it openly complains about the USA's behaviour, ridicules the decline of the USA, and also expresses the view that Washington is facing the consequences of China's violation. In broader scenarios, the Sino-US relationship is deteriorating.

The absence of collective efforts by the P5+1 to bring Iran back to the UN Security Council is another interesting reason. Russia has many differences with the Biden Administration and also has complex relations with Iran, including direct involvement in Iran's civilian nuclear programme. However, Russian officials are clearly concerned about the possibility of Iran's proliferation and speak of the need to limit Iran.

The Iranian leadership's views on the nuclear talks are unclear, but there are growing indications that President Raisi and the clerics are more distrustful of the

USA than ever before. Tehran is examining the decline of US influence in the region. China is allying with the Iranian resistance and pursuing a goal of gaining special blessings from Iran which will bring energy benefits for it.

Russian diplomat Mikhail Ulyanov has played a key role in the Vienna-based nuclear talks with Iran and played the role of a messenger between Iranian and American officials. A senior US negotiator was in a closed-door meeting last week and appreciated Russia's positive role. He described Russian willingness to adopt a "very cooperative approach". In it, "they want to work with us to see if we can get back to the agreement."

Another reason is the Chinese increasing its investment in the Persian Gulf, particularly in Iran. That is a clear violation of US sanctions against Iran. With a beginning in the Trump Administration and an increase under the Biden Administration, China has made clear its violation of US law. Iran desperately needed cash, meanwhile,

China has benefited from subsidized oil. As long as the nuclear talks continue, a few barrels of oil here and there can act as a negotiator. However, China imported a record amount of oil from Iran, which has increased more than 11 million barrels per day. The future of the nuclear talks is still unclear whether Iran will agree with the USA, and it is also unclear that China will agree to cut off its imports.

Although China also has serious concerns about Iran's proliferation, it is happy to be freely involved in global efforts to stop Iran. China expresses all the feelings about its desire to resolve the dispute through negotiations, but at the same time adheres to its agreements with Iran. Both the countries are business partners and China is the only big customer of Iranian oil due to its isolation in the world.

China accounts for about a third of Iran's trade and Iran accounts for less than one percent of China's trade. China's economy is 30 times larger than Iran's and its population 18 times larger. China is an elephant and Iran is an ant. Although China does not agree with the proliferation of Iran, but it does not feel threatened by Iran. China also sees Iran as a useful tool in its foreign policy, as a way to get closer to the USA and its allies, and takes Iran as a country in its proximity. The main thing is to pull the trigger.

The Iranian leadership's views on the nuclear talks are unclear, but there are growing indications that President Raisi and the clerics are more distrustful of the USA than ever before. Tehran is examining the decline of US influence in the region. China is allying with the Iranian resistance and pursuing a goal of gaining special blessings from Iran which will bring energy benefits for it.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Can The United States Ever Get Foreign Policy Right? – OpEd By Ivan Eland

The U.S. government has made many mistakes on foreign policy of late, even repeating errors from the past. That's because the American foreign policy establishment—the Department of Defense, the Department of State, other government agencies, Congress, and the media—continue to rely on clearly tried and failed interventionist principles. On occasion, both President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump have laudably bucked that establishment. Some examples are Biden's insistence on finally withdrawing all U.S. forces from Afghanistan, Trump's diplomatic opening to North Korea, and the latter's insistent hectoring of long wealthy allies about not spending enough on their defenses. Yet the two presidents were lambasted heavily by foreign policy elites in the media for defying interventionist conventions. Even during Trump's rogue reign, the establishment was able to corral him on most foreign policy issues, largely because they claimed, unfortunately with some truth, that Trump's foreign policy seemed intended primarily to benefit his own personal and political fortunes first. The establishment has had an easier time of it with Biden because he has simply been around Washington a long time, thoroughly imbibing on the intoxicating, but expensive, fumes of being a global superpower.

But let's start with Trump. After obliquely threatening North Korea with nuclear war—very dangerous behavior—he jerked U.S. policy to the opposite extreme by attempting an opening to the Hermit Kingdom. Trump laudably began talking to his adversary to reduce tensions, but he then got played by North Korean strongman Kim Jong-un by getting too wrapped up in the glory of high-stakes personal summitry. Trump also had the right idea of jawboning now rich allies to spend more on defense and achieved some (probably temporary) success. Yet he should have then taken the opportunity to reduce the U.S. defense burden. Instead, he was enamored with military power for its own sake—as demonstrated by his failed attempt to get the military to put on a lavish martial parade in his honor—and significantly ballooned an already bloated bureaucracy. Also, he used that enlarged military to irresponsibly and illegally assassinate Iran's second most powerful man, who was visiting Iraq. Finally, he correctly questioned the continued relevance of the Cold War-era NATO alliance, but the foreign policy establishment—thoroughly imbued with the idea that alliances are

ends in themselves rather than means to national security—quickly snuffed out that discussion.

Biden—having long drunk the Kool-Aid that U.S. alliances “won the Cold War” and should continue as they are in perpetuity—is seemingly taking risky moves that could result in war with the nuclear powers of China and Russia. The Taiwan issue is much more strategic and emotional to China than it is to the United States. The island has long had an ambiguous U.S. security guarantee. Overtly, the United States has committed to selling the island’s government only weapons to defend itself. However, Biden recently publicly “slipped” and pledged to defend Taiwan if it were attacked by China. It is hard to discern whether this was one of Biden’s occasional gaffes or, to reinforce deterrence against any Chinese attack, an intentional revelation of a secret wink-and-nod agreement with Taiwan to do just that if the balloon goes up. Instead, what needs to be publicly reinforced and strengthened is the existing limited commitment to sell arms to Taiwan, including offensive ballistic missiles that would allow Taiwan, without the promise of U.S. military intervention, to increase deterrence against a Chinese assault. Otherwise, the ambiguity of U.S. intentions again may create a repeat of the United States being dragged into non-strategic wars, such as those in Korea in 1950 and the Persian Gulf in 1991.

Even more crazy is the Biden administration’s pulling out and dusting off George W. Bush’s commitment to induct the countries of Ukraine and Georgia into the already overstretched NATO alliance. These nations, especially Ukraine, are in Russia’s traditional sphere of influence and much more vital to its security than they are to that of the faraway United States. The United States would be very unhappy if any foreign power formed a military alliance with Mexico or Cuba, as it was in late 1962. Thus, inducting Ukraine and Georgia may make an already unfriendly Russia uncontrollable with rage; the Russians already face a hostile NATO on its borders in the Baltic states. After World War I, the United States and its allies ignored the inclusive model of the successful post-Napoleonic-War Congress of Vienna in 1815, which resulted in no major war in Europe for a century; the result was a punitive post-World War I peace with Weimar Germany that led to the rise of Adolf Hitler and World War II. After the Cold War, the United States and its allies again rubbed a defeated enemy’s nose in the dirt by expanding NATO to the border of Russia—a country that lost 26 million people to a Nazi invasion from the West during World War II—and is now compounding the

danger of war with the Russians by reiterating its interest in pushing the alliance farther forward into Ukraine and Georgia.

Biden rushed to the exits in Afghanistan, and therefore some initial mistakes were made, but his rush to the door there becomes understandable given that the U.S. military had been stonewalling and outmaneuvering presidents from Obama forward on the issue. The men in uniform could not admit, even after twenty years, that they had lost the war. Yet, now Biden is negotiating overflight rights (and more?) with Pakistan to retain an option for aerial strikes in the forever U.S. war on terrorism—American military interventions that motivate terrorist attacks on U.S. targets in the first place. Even if these questionable overflight agreements are necessary for U.S. security, couldn't George W. Bush have negotiated the same deal on the way out of Afghanistan in 2002, after smashing al Qaeda and the Taliban, and saved a lot of U.S., allied, and Afghan lives and loads of cash? This situation reminds one of Richard Nixon pledging in the 1968 election campaign to get out of Southeast Asia, only to stall for four years till he was re-elected so that he would not face political blowback for "losing" Vietnam; in 1973, he had to take the same bad agreement to end a lost war that he could have gotten in 1969, thus saving countless lives. At least Biden had the courage to own the political pain for withdrawing from Afghanistan. But could negotiating air transit rights in Pakistan lay the foundation for eventual U.S. re-entry, as some interventionists threaten will be needed and as did Obama foolishly in Iraq.

After a decent interval, the interventionists again will count on the American public's short memory to allow them to beat the drums for military interventions in faraway lands. With the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, public opinion has put interventionists in at least temporary retreat—as they were for a time after the debacle in Vietnam—but U.S. foreign policy will not permanently improve as long as they continue to have political dominance in the salons of Washington.

Source: Published in Euro Asia Review

Indian Toxic Disinformation Campaigns By Muhammad Ali Alvi

India has always tried to tarnish Pakistan's image internationally, be it by false flag operations or disinformation campaigns. And in doing so, it has made a mockery of itself by its unwarranted, outrageous and unaccredited actions.

Let us start with a false flag operation in 1971. India launched a false flag operation on January 30th, 1971 by staging the hijack of a Fokker plane. Its purpose was to lengthen the flight distance between East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan which was achieved by banning over-flights of its territory. The distance increased to three times the original distance which created a further divide between the two wings. And, to disseminate disinformation about Pakistan's alleged role in Kashmir.

In 1999, an Indian plane was hijacked to Kandahar and Pakistan was blamed for it. The Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval blamed Pakistan and its Intelligence service for providing intelligence to the hijackers. It was rather an attempt to malign Pakistan without any proof.

In 2000, the Chattisinghpura massacre, just before the then US president Bill Clinton's visit to India, was staged that killed 35 innocent Sikhs in Anantnag, Indian-Occupied Kashmir. Its purpose was to communalize the Kashmir dispute and blame Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism in Kashmir.

Similarly, the Indian Parliament, Mumbai, Uri, and Pathankot attacks were controversial and staged to serve different purposes and to portray Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism.

In 2019, India staged another false flag operation. This time its purpose was to provide BJP with a base to secure a majority in upcoming elections. And to spread disinformation about Pakistan's alleged link and support to the Kashmiri resistance. That it was staged was further confirmed by leaked WhatsApp chats of Arnab Goswami.

Media on the other hand should help in the dissemination of the right information and in pointing out fake news designed to create conflict. The public using social media should be aware of these disinformation agendas and must not fall for them

In 2020, a Brussels-based independent non-profit organisation, EU Disinfo Lab, that " focused on tackling sophisticated disinformation campaigns targeting the EU" published a report "Indian Chronicles".

The report unearthed disinformation campaigns of India orchestrated to "discredit Pakistan internationally" and to "influence decision-making at the UNHRC and the European Parliament".

Talking about the extent and capacity of the 15-year disinformation campaign, the executive director of the EU Disinfo Lab said "it is the largest network we have exposed". The campaign was run by SG (Shrivastava group) and was spread over 110 countries. It involved 750+ fake social media outlets and 10 UN-accredited NGOs.

The purpose of the campaign was to discredit, criticize and malign Pakistan internationally, disseminate disinformation against Pakistan and lobby for Indian interests. Here, it is important to mention that ANI, India's largest wire service, was involved in the proliferation of fake news against Pakistan.

According to reports, there were 13 instances when ANI re-published information originally shared on EU Chronicles- a fake news site of the Shrivastava group.

This alarming and eyeopening report did not prevent Indian print and electronic media from disseminating disinformation against Pakistan. At a time when the world needed unbiased and fact-based reporting during the recent Afghan crisis, Indian media resorted to its old tactics and circulated disinformation against Pakistan. For example, Republic TV reported that Pakistan invaded Panjshir Valley. Similarly, Times Now Navbharat and Zee Hindustan aired fake footage and claimed that Pakistan had bombed Panjshir. However, a fact-checking website "Boom" found Indian claims misleading as the footage aired by the Indian media outlets was from a video game.

But, with ever-rising social media and ever-expanding number of social media users, the threat has increased manifold.

The most recent example is of a disinformation storm artificially created on social media by social media users in India soon after Pakistan lost the semi-final to Australia in the T20 World Cup.

As soon as the match ended, social media users started spreading fake news. It is noteworthy to mention that the campaign was started by Indian journalists, news anchors, news websites and other highly followed persons.

An attempt was made to create an atmosphere of hate by spreading disinformation that a cricketer in Pakistan was targeted because of his sect. This information was wrong to an extent that the cricketer did not even belong to the sect with which he was associated.

Here, it is relevant to mention that an Indian Muslim cricketer was abused mercilessly and trolled on social media when India lost to Pakistan on 24th October. He was abused, called a traitor and asked to go to Pakistan. To compensate for what they did, they tried to replicate this in Pakistan by a sophisticated and preplanned disinformation campaign. The disinformation campaign was an attempt to spread hate and malign Pakistan's image and discredit it for not being fair with its factions.

These disinformation campaigns are directed by the government and amplified by journalists, news anchors, film stars and those with a huge fan following.

When the shot is fired, the common users are expected to do the rest.

In the most recent context, some analysts believe that these disinformation campaigns on social media should not worry Pakistan as it exposes Indian media. But Pakistan should be aware of the fact that it is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-sect state. And these disinformation campaigns can trigger reactions as ordinary social media users can fall prey to these disinformation campaigns.

The fire should be met with fire, not in its method or way but its intensity and capacity.

Pakistan must adopt a three-pronged strategy to deal with these disinformation campaigns. Government, media and social media users must collaborate and do

their bit. Government should highlight and inform the world that Indian claims of Pakistan being behind the Kashmiri resistance are as fake as these media and social media disinformation campaigns. It should demystify the world about Indian hegemonic designs in Kashmir and its nefarious agenda in neighbouring countries.

It might not impact Indian allies who preferred to remain silent even on an eye-opening EU Disinfo Lab report, either because of its market potential or because of economic relations, but it will attract those in search of truth.

Media on the other hand should help in the dissemination of the right information and in pointing out fake news designed to create conflict. The public using social media should be aware of these disinformation agendas and must not fall for them.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Biden-Xi Summit and Beyond By Maleeha Lodhi

NO breakthrough was expected in the first virtual summit meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Nov 15. Their first exchange by video since the advent of the Biden administration lasted three and a half hours. It ranged over all the issues on which the world's two superpowers compete, disagree, collaborate, clash and confront each other — trade, Taiwan, Iran, North Korea, technology, climate change, human rights and strategic weapons. Although no specific outcome emerged from these summit talks it was clear that both sides sought this interaction at the highest level to defuse tensions that seemed to spin out of control in the past several months and sent ties plunging to an unprecedented and perilous low.

The effort at de-escalation came as relief to the international community increasingly concerned about the stand-off between the two powers as this involves far-reaching consequences for them, the global economy and international stability. Most countries want to avoid being caught in the cross hairs of this confrontation and do not want to be forced to make a choice between them especially as many, including America's European allies, have important economic stakes in ties with Beijing.

The Biden-Xi talks marked an acknowledgement by both sides of the need to manage tensions and explore areas where they could cooperate amid what Biden calls "extreme competition". At the very outset, the American president conveyed to Xi that responsibility obliged them to ensure that competition "does not veer into conflict, whether intended or unintended". China for its part, has always maintained it wants to stabilise and improve relations while also signalling it would push back hard against provocative US actions. In his opening remarks, Xi told Biden "the world's two largest economies need to increase communication and cooperation" and he called for a "sound and steady" relationship.

Will relations stabilise or remain hostage to US insecurity over the rise of a rival superpower?

Since Biden assumed office, he has pursued a tough line on China, quite indistinguishable from his predecessor Donald Trump's policy that saw the US impose wide-ranging trade tariffs on Chinese exports, adopt aggressive rhetoric and take steps seen as provocative by Beijing. This hard-line approach has been driven by Washington's growing fear of a rival superpower's rising global economic, military and technological power. Biden's stance also reflects the political consensus in the US that views China as an adversary to be contained and not just competed against.

This thinking urged his administration towards moves in recent months that reinforced Beijing's belief that the US under Biden was continuing with a strategy to contain China. In September 2021, Washington forged a new trilateral security pact with the UK and Australia, AUKUS, aimed at enhancing Australia's naval power by nuclear-powered submarines to counter China's military ascendancy in the western Pacific. Soon after, the White House hosted leaders of the so-called Quad — comprising US, Australia, Japan and India — to cement an anti-China coalition among regional states. These moves were denounced by Beijing as a threat to regional peace and security. In the virtual summit President Xi warned of the dangerous consequences for global peace of dividing the world into different camps.

The Nov 15 meeting appeared to zero in on security and geopolitical issues even though other matters were also discussed. Understandably, as they have driven the recent spike in tensions. An area that reportedly saw modest progress concerned their nuclear arsenals. The Financial Times called this a breakthrough but that overplays the apparent agreement reached on holding 'strategic stability' talks aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear conflict. This may however be imperilled by last week's US action of placing a dozen Chinese companies on a blacklist ostensibly on 'national security' grounds because they aid the Chinese military's development efforts.

Taiwan was among the thorniest issues discussed during the meeting, with the Chinese leader warning the US of a strong response if Beijing's red line was crossed i.e. encouraging "separatist forces" in Taiwan. Xi characterised this as "playing with fire". Biden conveyed the US position, reflected in the statement

later issued by the White House, of opposition to “unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait” — a reference to China’s military movements in the area. The US has itself been stepping up its military presence and sending warships to the region. This fraught situation has aroused concerns among regional states and prompted warnings from leaders, notably Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong, about the risk of a military clash due to miscalculation between the US and China. Although the US restated its commitment to a ‘one China’ policy in the meeting, Biden’s decision to invite Taiwan to its Summit on Democracy next month is another provocative move that has already accentuated tensions with Beijing.

A rather bland US statement of its readout of the Biden-Xi meeting gave little indication of how Washington expects relations to evolve, other than reiterating “the importance of managing competition responsibly”, albeit a significant goal. The statement issued by China, on the other hand, clarified Beijing’s framework for improving ties. Xi identified three principles and four priorities for China-US cooperation. The three principles to guide future relations were mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation. The four priorities he set out are leading the global response to pressing challenges, exchanges at multiple levels to expand cooperation, managing differences to prevent derailment of ties and enhancing collaboration on major international issues.

The key question now is whether relations will gradually stabilise between the two countries. Much will depend on whether the Biden administration will continue to follow a contain-China policy that flows from a deeply entrenched Washington view that sees China as a strategic adversary and challenge. It also depends on how accommodating an increasingly assertive China will be of key US priorities. What is hard to determine is how the growing insecurity of an established superpower can be addressed when it sees and is discomforted by its global dominance being challenged by the world’s newest superpower. As Henry Kissinger recently put it, at this historic turning point, the fate of the world may well be decided by the relationship between the US and China.

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Published in Dawn, November 29th, 2021

A Global Government By M Zeb Khan

Imagine this scene from the Stone Age: people are living in caves and are completely dependent on Nature for their survival; they are vulnerable to all sorts of dangers. They don't have instruments and/or skills to shape things to their advantage. Time marches forward, and they gradually learn new ways of living. But things start to turn ugly when they get left behind by the very machines/tools they had developed for their convenience.

This dystopian turn of events is exactly what has happened to humanity in the name of progress in recent years. This much-touted progress is no longer sustainable unless there is a paradigmatic shift in the way we look at the entire 'ecosystem' of existence.

It was the watershed moment of 'scientific revolution' in the early 16th century when the 'man-matter relationship' changed the essence of humanity. We are now living in a time where human extinction has become a real possibility as threats like climate change, nuclear wars, and technological disruption are looming large on the horizon. None of us would have thought of the cataclysmic change in weather patterns around the globe that we see today. The planet is getting hotter and becoming unliveable, and melting glaciers are causing rising sea levels.

Nuclear weapons, which are powerful enough to destroy the world several times over in a matter of hours, are the most sought-after devices by countries with hegemonic desires, in the name of deterrence and defence. Instead of focusing on de-nuclearisation and non-proliferation, countries like Russia, the US, and China are investing in developing even more lethal weapons. Call them 'deterrent' weapons or by any other name, these weapons have taken away our peace of mind since they were first used in 1945, killing millions of civilians.

Similarly, technological disruption, with AI (artificial intelligence) and bio-engineering in the forefront, is on the way to radically transforming life into something indescribable – from ethical and legal perspectives. The rise of AI will allow companies to exercise power over people's 'personal choices'. As a result, people will somehow lose their agency in making buying and investment decisions – or in even building relations or severing ties with others.

These existential threats that we confront today are far more complex and imminent than those that were faced by our ancestors. Previously, catastrophes like droughts, floods and earthquakes and harsh weather conditions posed serious challenges for people. But those people were relatively wiser when it came to deciding on how to deal with the problems at hand. Community living made it possible to cooperate for food, physical security, and even reproduction. Social norms were developed to live together in harmony.

As the world population increased, new governance systems emerged which were highly influenced by the prevalent tribal structure and religious traditions. The Industrial Revolution, however, marked the beginning of a nation-state defined by a legal framework.

The nation-state has, however, outlived its useful life and needs to be abolished. National borders restrict the free movement of people and products and thus unnecessarily divide humanity. Spending billions in the name of national security is also a relic of our instinctual fear of ‘the other’.

Economic development, which now eats the planet like termite, is also the outcome of national competition for more with an emphasis on ‘now’. The doomsday scenario, mentioned above, can be averted if leaders start thinking globally and beyond the limitations of the present.

Now we have global challenges that can be dealt with only through a global structure – a kind of a global government – founded on the principle of one ‘humanity’, rather than a state defined by a particular race/community living in a designated territory.

A global government, unlike the UN, can be designed on democratic principles of a government of humanity, for humanity, and by humanity. This government, if created, would banish the curse of national sovereignty and bring in an era of peace, harmony, and progress for all.

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Source: Published in The News