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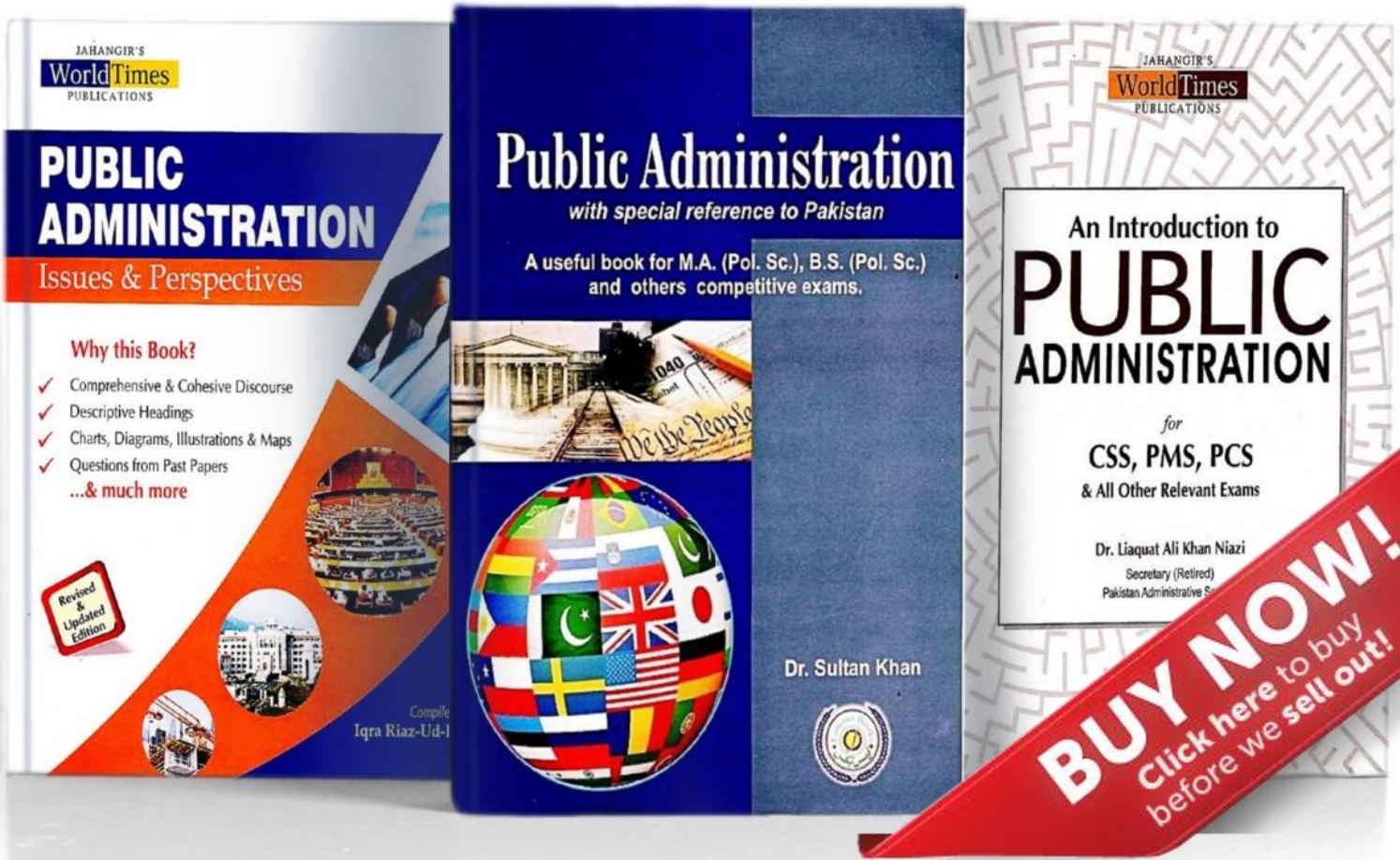
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PAKISTAN

China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh's Quadrilateral Cooperation By Pathik Hassan

China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are all near neighbours in the region. All four can share common regional ties both in terms of their geographical proximity, development journey and through more recent ties through membership of the regional trade bloc.

Sri Lanka differs in that it is an island economy and has been utilizing this in terms of developing and redeveloping its maritime facilities in international trade and commerce. Long known, even to the ancient Greeks, as a maritime hub in South Asia, its redevelopment, with Chinese financial assistance through the Belt and Road Initiative of its West coast Colombo Port is poised to hasten a reset in regional maritime trade capabilities. To the East, its Hambantota Port, Airport and Free Trade Zone are beginning to attract clients looking at servicing East Asia and towards ASEAN, China, and ultimately the CPTPP. Sri Lanka, which previously looked West to India, the Gulf and East Africa, now has a dual face looking East. With its Northern Port of Jaffna to be renovated and developed later in the decade, Sri Lanka will ultimately end up with ports serving the Bay of Bengal to the North with onward passage possible into Central Asia.

Bangladesh also joined the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017 and its location in the Bay of Bengal gives a strategic position in Southeast and South Asia. It shares borders with ASEAN and India, has free trade agreements with numerous ASEAN nations, China, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka and is utilizing these geographic and trade advantages. Bangladesh is moving forward. It is going to be the next South Asian miracle.

At present, Pakistan is the only South Asian country showing its full-scale strategic significance to the region at this moment. Its foreign policy has shifted towards geo-economics from geo-strategy. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port have added huge extra regional value in this regard in

terms of infrastructure and capacity, with the significance of this still poorly understood. However what CPEC does is connect China's Western Xinjiang Province to the Arabian Gulf in addition to giving access to Central Asia. Some connectivity still needs to be completed, but this will happen in the next two years. Should the Afghanistan situation settle down it will further boost Pakistan's infrastructure use.

It is pertinent to understand that Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are all active participants in China's Belt & Road Initiative. Sri Lanka's Hambantota and Colombo ports are considered epicentres of China's BRI in South Asia. Sri Lankan ports can be used as a regional maritime hub between South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and East Africa. That in turn gives an additional important connectivity route via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor from Pakistan's Gwadar through to Central Asia., Pakistan and Central and Western China.

Sri Lanka and Pakistan therefore have an opportunity to increase their maritime capabilities and work together in maritime trade, investment, science and technology, and culture through enhancing these connectivity opportunities. Sri Lanka has an FTA with Pakistan and is negotiating one at present with China. It also has an FTA with Singapore. However, given the developing maritime connectivity, Sri Lanka would also gain by entering discussions with Pakistan (Central Asia access), Russia (Eurasian Economic Union access), Mauritius (access to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement) and consider how it could leverage itself into the CPTPP countries in East Asia and Asia Pacific as a longer-term aim.

Pakistan connectivity is certainly growing. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Sri Lanka in February this year, interestingly hosted also by Russian businessmen. During his visit to Sri Lanka, Khan focused on Pakistan's connectivity with Sri Lanka, its existing use of Karachi Port and the additional Central Asian options that Gwadar provides.

Pakistan's Muslim community are well positioned to provide Islamic packaging for these markets, which Sri Lanka as a Buddhist nation is less able to provide.

There are motivations for both to do so– Pakistan is a conduit for opening new trade corridors for Sri Lankan made products, an increasing share of which will be

from Chinese invested JVs and Sino-Lankan ventures. China will want market access to Central Asia and that means via CPEC.

Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi products can be exported from those regions easily. The raw materials for the apparel sector (cotton) can be imported easily from Pakistan, China and Central Asian states. In this case, the business relations among Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China and other Muslim countries will be strengthened. Sri Lanka-Bangladesh-China-Pakistan (Quadrilateral) ties will be further bolstered. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and China's Quadrilateral Co-operation in the region could reflect the greater regional quadrilateral understanding.

During the visit to Sri Lanka, Khan commented that Pakistan is allocating land to Uzbekistan for warehousing and export services, and that the same facility can also be provided to Sri Lanka. Uzbekistan is a rapidly developing Central Asia nation and although landlocked, can access other regional markets that open these up for Sri Lankan made products. Uzbekistan is surrounded by five countries: Kazakhstan to the north, Kyrgyzstan to the north-east, Tajikistan to the southeast, Afghanistan to the south, and Turkmenistan to the southwest. Collectively the Central Asian nations have a GDP (PPP) of \$1 trillion, a projected post-covid growth rate of about 5-6% and a population of some 73 million. Its average GDP (PPP) per capita is four times higher than Sri Lanka, meaning the region is a wealthy market for Sri Lanka to target for exports.

Bangladesh can also benefit from using Pakistan's Gwadar port for the same reasons, with a GDP per capita base seven times lower than the Central Asian average.

Maritime connectivity is key. Bangladesh's Chittagong, Payra and Mangla ports can be connected with Pakistan's Gwadar port and CPEC including Karachi, Port Qasim and Keti Bandar via Sri Lanka's Colombo and Hambantota Ports to create a quadrilateral access and distribution hub. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed recently between the Port Authority of Thailand (Rawang Port) and the Chittagong Port Authority of Bangladesh. Chittagong-Ranong port connectivity could boost SAARC-ASEAN trade if connected to Gwadar port and CPEC via Sri Lanka's Colombo and Hambantota ports. The whole region would benefit, not just some specific countries.

Sri Lankan traditional tea, apparel, rice, and agricultural industries, together with upcoming machinery and industrial manufacturing industries such as auto tyres can be mixed with Bangladeshi apparel, medicines, fruits, and vegetables along with its upcoming IT services and electronic sectors.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka both import goods such as cotton from Pakistan, the Central Asian states, Western and Central China and even Russia. Pushing this existing trade however requires a holistic trilateral effort. If Sri Lanka and Bangladesh can make better use of CPEC, they can take part in the development process in Afghanistan with Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran. The South Asian SAARC, the regional trade bloc, may also be revived through these activities.

Intra-regional and international tourism can also become a platform for services growth. Religious tourism is a growing sector, with Bangladesh, Pakistan and to some extent Sri Lanka more tolerant than neighbouring India, where religious differences are currently being politically exploited in favour of the Hindu mainstream.

However, Pakistan has many historical Buddhist sites such as the ancient civilizations of Gandhara and Taxila. These would be of interest to Sri Lankans. Sri Lanka meanwhile has historical places important in Muslim culture, such as Adam's Peak and the ancient Dewatagaha Mosque.

As regional states, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh should be examining a revival of connections with Pakistan and China. The Belt and Road Initiative has and is being built to promote such interconnectivity. South and Southeast Asian Governments and businesses should be examining how best to exploit it. Chinese investments may be accelerated.

Pakistan's well-connected Gwadar Port has brought a new dream for the South Asian region. This massive Port is not only for Pakistan but also for all other regional States. Chinese Investment has accelerated the pace of aspirations in this regard. China's multibillion dollar project the "China Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) is linked with the Gwadar Port. This excellent Port creates some sort of possibilities and potentials for the entire South Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, Western Asia, Eurasia, East Asia and Middle East. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh can reach Western China, Central Asia, and Pakistan easily through this Port.

Pakistan's Gwadar Port has a very strategic significance. China and Pakistan are working together to transform the Gwadar Port into a regional hub. Using the Gwadar Port, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh can easily access the emerging markets of Central Asian states, Western part of China, Pakistan, even Afghanistan and the Western Asian states.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka both import goods such as cotton from Pakistan, Central Asian States, Western and Central China and even Russia. Pushing this existing trade however requires a holistic trilateral effort. If Sri Lanka and Bangladesh can make better use of the Gwadar Port and the CPEC, they can take part in the development process in Afghanistan with Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran. The South Asian SAARC trade bloc may also be revived through these activities. Intra-regional and international tourism can also become a platform for services growth. Religious tourism can be a growing sector amongst Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi products can be exported from those regions easily. The raw materials for the apparel sector (cotton) can be imported easily from Pakistan, China and Central Asian states. In this case, the business relations among Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China and other Muslim countries will be strengthened. Sri Lanka-Bangladesh-China-Pakistan (Quadrilateral) ties will be further bolstered. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and China's Quadrilateral Cooperation In The Region could reflect the greater regional quadrilateral understanding.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Make SAARC a Success | Editorial

Pakistan offered an olive branch to India, inviting it to attend the upcoming SAARC Summit in Islamabad. The initiative is in need of being reciprocated by New Delhi, and it should walk the extra few miles to realise the objective of regional integration. The seven-member-plus Afghanistan, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has been a victim of India-Pakistan feud, and has not been able to make any headway in any of the realms of cooperation since its inception in 1985. This is why neither trade nor tourism could flourish, and despite having a broad canvas of economic orientation, regional cooperation is a naught. It's a sadist phenomenon and has defeated the very purpose of amalgamation and empowering around two billion populace.

Islamabad, as a rotating member, is scheduled to host the summit this year. It is ironic that the last time SAARC heads of states met was in 2014, and in 2016 Pakistan's turn was torpedoed by India on the flimsy pretexts of security concerns. India's boycotting of Pakistan moot in 2016 was no more than a vendetta, and reflected how unconcerned it is towards the collective goals of betterment in the region. The fact that many of the member states are submissive to the highhandedness of India, and cater to its hegemon, has further crippled the prospects of regional integration.

The good omen is that SAARC Secretary General Esala Ruwan Weerakoon visited Islamabad in December and discussed the prospects of the upcoming summit. Pakistan, in quest of regional serenity, went ahead to propose that the Indian leadership could also be part of virtual participation if it continues to have any reservations for attending Islamabad moot. This was wisely suggested by Pakistan, as a way out, so that the requirement of consensus to hold the summit is fulfilled, and the moot goes ahead.

SAARC member states should rally behind Pakistan's intention and prevail over India to make the regional body an organic entity. It is a moment of realisation for India too, which has crippled geo-economics prospects by unleashing a wave of terror in Kashmir, and refusing to talk to Pakistan. Time for Delhi to do away with its adamant approach and see reason in regional coherence.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 5th, 2022.

Pakistan's Diplomatic Wins in 2021 By Omar Shahkar

THE year 2021 was a busy one for Pakistan diplomatically, with a Taliban takeover in neighbouring Afghanistan, an upward trajectory in relations with Gulf countries and mixed signals from the new administration in the United States.

The Taliban took control of Afghanistan in mid-August as US-led foreign troops withdrew 20 years after invading the country.

The takeover prompted panic and chaos, and put the country on the verge of humanitarian catastrophe as the US and allied countries suspended billions of dollars .

Thousands of people had been airlifted from the country since August, with Pakistan facilitating the evacuation of 16,000 diplomats, foreigners, aid workers, journalists and vulnerable Afghans on its national flag carrier flights and through its land borders.

The evacuation efforts and later Pakistan's humanitarian support for its war-battered neighbour have earned appreciation from the international community, as Islamabad made addressing the crisis one of the main points of its foreign policy and held a number of highest-level international meetings with regional countries and the world's superpowers, including an extraordinary moot of the Organization of Islamic Corporation (OIC).

Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia have been on an upward trajectory and Prime Minister Imran Khan visited the Kingdom twice in 2021, in May and October.

After Khan's second visit, the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) announced a generous financial package of \$4.2 billion to help the South Asian nation address depleting foreign reserves.

The SFD deposited \$3 billion dollars into the Pakistani Central Bank and pledged it would additionally supply \$1.2 billion worth of oil to Pakistan on credit. Home to over 2.5 million Pakistani expatriates, Saudi Arabia also remained Islamabad's

largest source of remittances, which during the first five months of the 2021 financial year reached over \$3.2 billion.

The Pakistan Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai has received over 550,000 visitors and led to the signing of dozens of investment and cooperation agreements since the exhibition opened in October.

Most of the deals signed relate to the fields of infrastructure, housing, water management, waste management and trade in goods and services.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi undertook a number of bilateral visits to Middle Eastern countries in 2021, including Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq and Iran.

A number of bilateral visits at the ministerial and services chief levels were also undertaken.

After the visit of the Foreign Minister of Kuwait, Ahmed Nasser Al- Sabah, to Islamabad in March, Kuwait decided to ease visa restrictions for Pakistani nationals, which had been in place since 2011.

Additionally, under a government-to-government bilateral framework cooperation agreement on the recruitment of healthcare professionals from Pakistan, around 1800 healthcare professionals have travelled to Kuwait already.

Pakistan and Bahrain also convened the second session of the Joint Ministerial Commission in July 2021.

The militaries of India and Pakistan said in a rare joint statement in February that they had agreed to observe a ceasefire along the disputed border in Kashmir, having exchanged fire hundreds of times in recent months.

The nuclear-armed neighbours had signed a ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Kashmir region in 2003.

After the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in the public hearing in Congress in September that Pakistan had a “multiplicity of interests some that are in conflict with ours.

” He said the US would “recalibrate” its relationship with Pakistan in the coming weeks to formulate what role Washington would want it to play in the future of Afghanistan.

Pakistan’s relations with China faced a jolt after a blast on a bus killing 13 people in north Pakistan in July, including nine Chinese nationals.

Work on the project stalled for several months after the blast and the Chinese repeatedly called for foolproof security for their workers in Pakistan before they continued with the Dasu and other projects.

After extensive diplomatic efforts and the beefing up of the security of Chinese nationals, work on the project has reportedly resumed.

—The writer is contributing columnist, based in Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Climate Policy 2021 Through Maritime Lens of Pakistan By Dr Kanwar M Javed Iqbal

It is good portent that the Government of Pakistan has issued the updated version of the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) in October 2021.

Although some gaps are still present, it is a step in the right direction considering the importance of periodic review process for policy and legal instruments. It is hoped that the remaining gaps would have due consideration in the next policy review cycle.

The most inspiring thing is the addition of 'Policy Objective 9' regarding policy coherence and integration into the sectoral economies to achieve the milestones for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the light of UN's Sustainable Development Report 2020 (SDR 2020) and Pakistan's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Statement.

Policy coherence is a critical aspect and big challenge mostly in developing countries, though developed countries are still striving to achieve a satisfactory level of policy stability while reducing the policy failure. Being a developing nation, Pakistan is no exception.

Coherence of NCCP 2021 is particularly important in the context of Pakistan's national and provincial sectoral policies, development plans and strategies where it is a missing link.

To put in place a fully coherent governance mechanism, the actual spirit of NCCP 2021 needs to be reciprocated and duly integrated into all sectors at federal and provincial levels without which desired results cannot be achieved.

While comparing the updated document i.e. NCCP 2021 with its first version as was approved in 2012, it is visible that efforts have been made to cater for the important requirements which were emerged during the last decade such as Paris Agreement on climate change, SDGs, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, NDC Statement and the notion of Blue Economy in the backdrop of Rio+20.

Regarding requirements for maritime climate agenda, majority of the things pertaining to the sectoral economies involved and the health of the ecosystem are addressed in the overall document i.e., directly under dedicated Section 4.6.4 titled 'Coastal and Marine Ecosystems', and indirectly at various places under different sections of the Policy as deemed appropriate, except for some important things, remain un-attended.

As far as the notion of Blue Economy is concerned, NCCP 2021 has recognized it by underlining the importance as an emerging concept which encourages sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs, while preserving the health of marine and coastal ecosystem.

NCCP 2021 accepts that 'the Blue Economy sector presents many investment opportunities in the Maritime Sector in Pakistan' which is encouraging and would help in promoting and maintaining the sustainability aspects of marine ecosystem in the Anthropocene.

It is pertinent that the policy statement and measures regarding 'Blue Economy' are totally inclined towards climate adaptation response strategies. Whereas commitment towards climate mitigation strategies under the umbrella of 'Blue Economy' is still ambiguous in the overall document.

Old text under NCCP 2012's Section 4.6.4 was inclined towards adaptation measures. Similarly, addition of six more new policy measures under the same section has reaffirmed the importance of adaptation needs for maritime climate change.

These measures include: (i) commitment to assist Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA) regarding 'Blue Economy' endeavours; (ii) determination to develop Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) system for coastal and marine ecosystems to quantify benefits and improved management; (iii) commitment to build capacities of local coastal communities and specifically the Fishermen Cooperative Societies to monitor and report climate change indicators in sea; (iv) mapping of vulnerable coastal areas for protection from anthropogenic developmental effect; (v) ensuring sustainable tourism opportunities through well-designed marine management, and

(vi) commitment to discourage in-land migrations for ensuring diversified local livelihood opportunities.

In addition to the notion of 'Blue Economy', new text in Section 4.6.4 of NCCP 2021 titled Coastal and Marine Ecosystems also underlines the importance of mangroves, particularly for carbon storage through new plantation drive which would be having a worth of about US\$ 500 million by the year 2050. It is important for both i.e. climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Under Section 5.7 titled 'Carbon Sequestration and Forestry', an important policy measure has been added for climate mitigation response i.e. commitment for devising a strategy for emissions reduction through mangrove drives and Reducing Emission from Deforestation & Forest Degradation Plus (REDD+). This has revitalized the significance of mangroves. Of course, it is a value addition in new document as the context of mangroves was limited to the country's forestry sector mitigation response.

Since climate finance is an important and integral part for country's overall response mechanism, it is good to see that a new policy measure under Section 9 is added to explore the innovative private finance schemes such as green bonds, blue bonds, nature bonds etc.

If succeeded, it would be a good pledge for preventing, halting, and reversing the degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems in Pakistan.

As far as the shortcomings are concerned, most of the missing links are related to the mitigation response. For example, nothing is added under Section 5.3 titled 'Transport' regarding the sea-going vessels.

It is also remained un-attended under Section 5.2 titled 'Energy Efficiency and Energy Conservation' for which operational aspect of sea-going vessels of various types and sizes is critically important.

There is a need to assess the carbon footprint of these vessels and bring energy efficiency through best available technological solutions and management practices.

Similarly, energy conservation at ports and harbours, as well as the concept of a climate smart city at Gwadar are also missing links.

—The writer is associated with the National Institute of Maritime Affairs. The views expressed are his own.

Source: Published in published pakobserver

Pak-US Equation and Dynamics By Shahzad Chaudhry

A Pakistani scholar at an American think-tank recently penned a laudable piece on Pak-US relations for the NYT. Madiha Afzal is a graduate of US schools and a fellow at a prestigious Washington institute. The piece is as good as it can get. So, kudos to her. Except that it is patently written for and addressed to the policy elites in Washington. It looks at this complex dyad with an American eye and works its way into suggesting a modified approach replacing the G2M (Government to Military) — preferred US approach as perceived by the author — with a G2G (Government to Government) or civil-civil construct. Inalienably such a course imputes a separation between the Pakistani military and the civilian government which is neither helpful nor realistic. Even if unintended it infuses a misplaced nuance to what is essentially a domestic dynamic.

The piece in many ways complemented an announcement in Islamabad of a National Security Policy which placed at its heart geo-economics, the current fad word. The policy brings the non-traditional security aspects of our nationhood into governmental focus and for the first time places into equal measure the security of the state and the security of the people in a government document. It can help a government reorient its policy priorities and determine its budget outlays along those lines. Clearly it will depend upon a government's spare fiscal capacity beyond repayment of debt, retaining an optimal defensive capability against multifarious internal and external threats, and running a government. Usually it spares only a modest outlay for routine development with current revenues. It was thus that Afzal suggests the US plugging into this dire need of Pakistan and look beyond the military-alone aspects of her relationship with Pakistan.

Clearly, the piece also nudges the US to outmanoeuvre China from her singular hold in Pakistan by making its economic presence felt through economic engagement that China has so adroitly leveraged in a Pakistan desperate for economic oxygen. Just as the US, China also has a significant defence relationship with Pakistan but of late she has diversified and broadened her arc of engagement to include economic planks in fulfillment of her global political and economic goals. The US may not fall for such a premise simply because it must too move along her own global and regional blueprint of interests. It would be a fallacy to assume that

anything less drives American disposition; certainly not an assumed and misplaced acrimony bordering on enmity which Pakistani popular opinion tends to characterise with American distancing from the region. We as people are easy victims of a zero-sum mindset.

So then what is the rational and practical approach to this phase in the Pak-US relationship? Clearly the US wanted out of Afghanistan not because it could not spare a few billion a month to support its presence if it wanted to. But it essentially was a re-tweaking of American needs which weren't being served by continuous presence. Hence, it called curtains. It though reflects that whatever were the conceived goals in Afghanistan were now no more. It also meant that any dream of an economic sub-block of this region composed of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan did not enthuse the US much. China on the other hand finds such a development, were it to eventuate, of benefit though she will save her money and mirth for later when the promise is realised.

China has its own direct access to parts of Central Asia through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and will not unnecessarily irk Russian sensitivity by expanding its interest unduly across the remaining Central Asia. But if other countries like Pakistan can create a nexus in the region China would have no qualms milking off it. CPEC may then develop some laterals. If not, China continues to meet its strategic need of connecting its western regions with a shorter route through Gwadar for trade and economic support. Oil and gas from Iran and minerals and metals from Afghanistan and Pakistan's Balochistan can doubly benefit China. These are all matters of additional convenience if economic activity can gain such resurgence along CPEC and its tributaries. But to label China for grander illusions than its essential needs is misplaced as well as misleading. In its existing geo-strategic construct none is willing to invest in the region till the flux settles.

The US is thus an improbable partner to the region — even in competition with China. If an opportunity presents itself to spoil China's progress the US can be a willing patron but to say that she may invest here to carve a space in pursuit of some ideational chimera is quite unlike the US. Their larger interests lie elsewhere. The role the US has for India is of a diversion of Chinese military and strategic effort. India is unlikely to enter war with China just because the US wants it to but will be the feint at the right price. Nor does one nuclear power act as a lackey for another — especially India, Pakistan, China and the US engaged in this modern version of Checkers in South Asia. India as a convenient prop only serves to divide

China's response along two axes — Tibet and Taiwan. What is currently happening on the western and northern extremities of India is China's deterring response to the Indo-US feint. Call it a preemptive disabling of a possible threatening posture by India in the south to gain a most essential freedom to focus only where it matters.

So what about Pakistan and the US? There shan't be much to gain from the US in the short-term because she has little interest here. Even Afghanistan is now reduced to a pro forma mention only. If someone offers an implicit gain so be it but the US isn't expending its energies in a lost cause. Which really means that any amount of imploring to widen the base of engagement with Pakistan will only return a blank. Even a persuasion in the name of democratic and liberal ideals to relegate the military with a civil-civil plank alone in the relationship is unlikely to cut much ice. The two nations will thus have the freedom to focus elsewhere more critical to them in the interregnum. Would that mean that the US is a friend no more and by some extension an enemy or a friend of the enemy? That will really depend on how Pakistan will like to phrase the relationship. Benign distancing is far better than an agitated and inflamed tryst turning into unnecessary acrimony. We would have then caused one when none existed.

A nation of some 250 million in popular estimates and a nuclear power to boot isn't a secondary player nor should it reduce itself to such a denomination in search for more popular allies or be seen to play a keen lackey. Zero-sum alternatives are a losing proposition in a world that has long changed its paradigm of engagement with each other. The US is a need-based patron/client. It is for us to exercise our independence from big-power enslavement.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 7th, 2022.

Strategic Scenario Between India and Pakistan 2017-2021 By Fatima Inam Qadir

India and Pakistan are two countries which are located in the South Asian region and both are neighbours, and both share almost the same history and same culture but have different religions. The rivalry of these two nuclear weapon states started after independence, when they got free from the British Colonial Raj.

Two of the three main Indo-Pakistani conflicts, in 1947 and 1965 and a short war in 1999, originated from disagreements over the Kashmir region. While both nations have maintained a shaky cessation of firing since 2003, they trade fire routinely across the disputed frontier called the Control Line. Both sides accuse the other of ceasefire breaches and say that the attacks are being made. Dozens of people were murdered and thousands displaced along the Control Line in a hurricane at the border in 2016 and 2018.

In 2014, following the invitation of then Pakistani Prime Minister Modi to attend his inauguration, Pakistan's then newly elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif went over, and there were expectations that the administration of Modi would continue genuine discussions for peace with Pakistan. However, following a brief time of hope, the relationship became harder again in August, after the Pakistani High Commissioner in India met with Kashmiri separatist leaders, when India postponed meetings with Pakistan's Foreign Minister. During 2015, many openings continued, including an unplanned December meeting on the margins of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris. A couple of days later, the Kashmir conflict was reviewed at a meeting between the National Security Advisors in Bangkok. Prime Minister Modi visited Lahore later in December in an amazing way to meet Prime Minister Sharif, the first Indian leader visiting Pakistan in more than 10 years.

In September 2016, momentum for serious negotiations ended, when armed terrorists assaulted a remote Indian military outpost in Uri, close to the Control Line, killing 80 Indian troops in the deadliest attack on Indian army in decades. Indian officials accused Jaish-e-Mohammad of supporting the attack, a group with suspected connections to Inter-Services Intelligence (the primary intelligence agency of Pakistan). The Indian Army later stated that in September 2016 it had

engaged in 'surgical strikes.' The Indian Army denied any such operations on terrorist camps in Pakistani-controlled areas along the Control Line.

In October 2017, the military started attacks on the Indian paramilitary camp close to Srinagar, as well as on the Indian Army facility in the Jammu area in February 2018, which killed five soldiers and a civilian. These assaults occurred at a period of increasing cross-border shelling along the Control Line, with over 3,000 breaches documented in 2017 and around 1,000 in the first half of 2018. In 2017, nearly 300 people, including civilians, Indian security personnel and terrorists, were shot down in assaults and skirmishes and violent rallies and marches to seek for the independence of Kashmir also persisted. India declared in May 2018 that it will for the first time observe a cessation of firing in Kashmir during the month of Ramadan in around two decades; the operations were restarted in June 2018 after months of Indian military operations aimed at both Kashmiri terrorists and protestors. In May 2018, India and Pakistan agreed to a cessation of firing along the contested Kashmir border, restoring the conditions of the 2003 accord.

The diversion from Afghanistan to Kashmir of Islamist fighters and proxy organizations threatens to generate further border bloodshed. If the attack of Lashkar e Tayyiba on Mumbai was carried out by Pakistan's terrorist proxies in 2008, where fighters struck the city for four days, killing 164 people, then a serious military conflict between both nuclear-armed powers may be sparked.

Narendra Modi has achieved a historic triumph as Prime Minister and his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has gained the greatest majority of any Indian party since 1984. The topic of how Modi approaches the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan during his second term became a matter of considerable interest not just among Indian and Pakistani experts, but also worldwide South Asian political watchers.

In his previous tenure, Modi attempted to strengthen relations with Pakistan with an invitation for his 2014 ceremony to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and visited Lahore on Christmas Day 2015 for an unexpected visit. After the Pathankot assault in January 2016, its government, by connecting dialogue with Islamabad, thought to be responsible for the attack, to its taking action, reversed the scheduled discussions with Pakistan. In response to an insurgent attack on its military station in Uri, India went through 'surgical strikes' within Azad Kashmir.

The strategic scenario between India and Pakistan is very important for the South Asian Region. Both countries have a history of wars and rivalry. After the Pulwama crisis, the relations between both states became colder and CPEC and China-Pakistan friendship is also becoming a threat to India. Both countries are trying to defend themselves and going into an arms race which will never end.

As India started its air attacks against supposed terrorist facilities on Pakistani soil that New Delhi said were behind an attack against the Indian paramilitary convoy in Pulwama earlier that month, tension increased in February 2019. Pakistan ransacked the commencement of air attacks in Kashmir, managed by India, followed by Pakistan seizing the Indian Air Force's Wg Cdr Abhinandan Varthaman. With several days of insecurity and animosity, things ended up easing when Pakistan took Varthaman back to India with a show of peace.

In the campaign for the Indian election to the Lok Sabha earlier this year, post-Pulwama acrimony was evident. Like past elections, this was also full of direct and indirect rhetoric against Pakistan, Modi's claiming that India is no longer frightened of nuclear threats from Pakistan and that India's nuclear arms are not only a demonstration. However, the chances for participation seem encouraging after the election. In May, during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers conference in Kazakhstan. Foreign Ministers from both countries informally met. Moreover, Prime Minister Imran Khan recently revealed the results of the Indian elections, calling Modi to compliment him and expressed the desire to enhance bilateral relations. Modi reaffirmed his earlier recommendation that they should work together to combat poverty, further cooperate and create a climate free of violence and terrorism. More lately, Indian authorities have been cited as recognizing Pakistan's significant actions against anti-India militant organizations by Indian media outlets which imply that dialogue is about to be opened.

For the relationship between India and Pakistan the next 12 to 18 months would be critical as the recent history bears witness to good gestures from any new Indian administration in the first few months of the tenure of Kashmir, which is the primary bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Due to a mutual antagonism between the two nations, the future character of their bilateral ties can be shaped by one of three probable scenarios. First, one option is that during Modi's second term, the status quo would continue without any grave interaction between the two nations, while violence remains confined to the control line (LoC). However,

following the sequence of moving above stated, such as the phone contact between Khan and Modi, which suggests a connection between the two, this scenario appears implausible.

Secondly, ties might further worsen between the two nations. If the Modi administration continues to embrace policies that see Pakistan-isolating as primary efforts, the probability of such a situation is increased. Examples of this are India's non-engagement, either bilaterally or multilaterally, with Pakistan since the December 2017 National Security Advisors negotiations, its withdrawal from Pakistan of the most-favored nation status, Pakistan's 2016 SAARC boycott, and the association between sports activity and the political nature of the relationship.

The third possibility involves some improvement in the bilateral relationship. This could take numerous possible forms, including Pakistan's actions against insurgent outfits against India, ending proxy and interlocking insurgent operations, both countries in Afghanistan taking account of each other's strategic interests, and India joining the Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The picture depends to a considerable extent on the seriousness of Pakistani and Indian administrations in mending bilateral ties. In addition, this possibility is also brought to light by the participation of external parties, such as the USA and China.

Pakistan's anti-India crackdown might serve as a start to the restoration, from 2013 and perhaps the march toward peace, of the composite or comprehensive conversation. Contrary to previous attacks, the Imran Khan regime took significant measures against prohibited outfits— local media reports suggest the offices of Kashmir insurgent organizations in Pakistan for the first time in more than three decades have reportedly been sealed and prominent leaders of prohibited outfits detained, including their properties. These actions have led to certain of these organizations being forced into the underground and it is stated that Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) has requested its cadres to prepare for "migration and fresh fighting." These steps show that Pakistan takes the proscribed groups seriously, and this might persuade India to give negotiations an opportunity.

Independently of their respective publics, India and Pakistan need improved bilateral relations, argues Ravi Agrawal. Both Modi and Khan will have the burden of ensuring that collaboration is not at the expense of their strategic objectives, he said. Agarwal Both nations should prevent the LoC flare-ups and enhance Kashmir's human rights. Pakistan and India must explore improving their bilateral

connections with foreign terrorist organizations, such as IS and AQIS, who are entering South Asia. The discrepancy between them prevents them from exploiting their full economic potential. Its trading potential is bilateral.

The strategic scenario between India and Pakistan is very important for the South Asian Region. Both countries have a history of wars and rivalry. After the Pulwama crisis, the relations between both states became colder and CPEC and China-Pakistan friendship is also becoming a threat to India. Both countries are trying to defend themselves and going into an arms race which will never end.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Foreign Policy Challenges Ahead By Maleeha Lodhi

FIVE key areas will be the main focus of Pakistan's foreign policy in the year ahead. Relations with China and the US while navigating the Sino-US confrontation, dealing with Afghanistan's uncertainties, managing the adversarial relationship with India and balancing ties between strategic ally Saudi Arabia and neighbour Iran.

Pakistan has to pursue its diplomatic goals in an unsettled global and regional environment marked by several key features. They include rising East-West tensions, increasing preoccupation of big powers with domestic challenges, ongoing trade and technology wars overlying the strategic competition between China and the US, a fraying rules-based international order and attempts by regional and other powers to reshape the rules of the game in their neighbourhood.

Understanding the dynamics of an unpredictable world is important especially as unilateral actions by big powers and populist leaders, which mark their foreign policy, have implications for Pakistan's diplomacy. In evolving its foreign policy strategy Pakistan has to match its goals to its diplomatic resources and capital. No strategy is effective unless ends and means are aligned.

Pakistan's relations with China will remain its overriding priority. While a solid economic dimension has been added to long-standing strategic ties, it needs sustained high-level engagement and consultation to keep relations on a positive trajectory. CPEC is on track, but there are issues to address in its second phase. They include simplifying cumbersome bureaucratic approval procedures for investors, resolving the issue of deferred payments to IPPs and promoting more business-to-business cooperation. Chinese concerns about security of their personnel working in Pakistan also need to be addressed. As the pivot of China's belt and road initiative — the 21st century's most ambitious economic enterprise — CPEC's timely progress is crucial to reinforce Beijing's interest in strengthening Pakistan, economically and strategically. Close coordination with Beijing on key issues remains important.

Pakistan's strategy must align ends with means and its goals to its diplomatic capital.

Pakistan wants to improve ties with the US. But relations will inevitably be affected by Washington's ongoing confrontation with Beijing, which American officials declare has an adversarial dimension while China attributes a cold war mindset to the US. Islamabad seeks to avoid being sucked into this big power rivalry. But this is easier said than done. So long as US-China relations remain unsteady it will have a direct bearing on Pakistan's effort to reset ties with the US especially as containing China is a top American priority.

US withdrawal from Afghanistan has diminished Pakistan's importance for Washington for now, at a time when many in the US blame Islamabad for its military debacle in Afghanistan. For almost two decades Afghanistan was the principal basis for engagement in their frequently turbulent ties, marked by both cooperation and mistrust. As Pakistan tries to turn a new page with the US the challenge is to find a new basis for a relationship largely shorn of substantive bilateral content. Islamabad's desire to expand trade ties is in any case contingent on building a stronger export base.

Read more: Pakistan desires relationship with US that is in sync with its 'changed priorities': Qureshi

Complicating this is Washington's growing strategic and economic relations with India, its partner of choice in the region in its strategy to project India as a counterweight to China. The implications for Pakistan of US-India entente are more than evident from Washington turning a blind eye to the grim situation in occupied Kashmir and its strengthening of India's military and strategic capabilities. Closer US-India ties will intensify the strategic imbalance in the region magnifying Pakistan's security challenge.

Multiple dimensions of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan will preoccupy Islamabad, which spent much of 2021 engaged with tumultuous developments there. While Pakistan will continue to help Afghanistan avert a humanitarian and economic collapse it should not underestimate the problems that may arise with an erstwhile ally. For one, the TTP continues to be based in Afghanistan and conduct attacks from there. The border fencing issue is another source of unsettled discord. Careful calibration of ties will be needed — assisting Afghanistan but

avoiding overstretch, and acknowledging that the interests of the Taliban and Pakistan are far from identical. Moreover, in efforts to mobilise international help for Afghanistan, Islamabad must not exhaust its diplomatic capital, which is finite and Pakistan has other foreign policy goals to pursue.

Managing relations with India will be a difficult challenge especially as the Modi government is continuing its repressive policy in occupied Kashmir and pressing ahead with demographic changes there, rejecting Pakistan's protests. The hope in establishment circles that last year's backchannel between the two countries would yield a thaw or even rapprochement, turned to disappointment when no headway was made on any front beyond the re-commitment by both neighbours to observe a ceasefire on the Line of Control.

Working level diplomatic engagement will continue on practical issues such as release of civilian prisoners. But prospects of formal dialogue resuming are slim in view of Delhi's refusal to discuss Kashmir. This is unlikely to change unless Islamabad raises the diplomatic costs for Delhi of its intransigent policy. Islamabad's focus on Afghanistan last year meant its diplomatic campaign on Kashmir sagged and was limited to issuing tough statements. Unless Islamabad renews and sustains its international efforts with commitment and imagination, India will feel no pressure on an issue that remains among Pakistan's core foreign policy goals.

With normalisation of ties a remote possibility, quiet diplomacy by the two countries is expected to focus on managing tensions to prevent them from spinning out of control. Given the impasse on Kashmir, an uneasy state of no war, no peace is likely to continue warranting Pakistan's sustained attention.

In balancing ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan should consider how to leverage possible easing of tensions between the long-standing rivals — of which there are some tentative signs. With Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman keen to use economic power to expand his country's diplomatic clout by making strategic overseas investments, Pakistan should use its political ties with Riyadh to attract Saudi investment through a coherent strategy. Relations with Iran too should be strengthened with close consultation on regional issues especially Afghanistan. The recent barter agreement is a step in the right direction.

In an increasingly multipolar world, Pakistan also needs to raise its diplomatic game by vigorous outreach to other key countries and actors beyond governments to secure its foreign policy goals.

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

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Pak-Afghan Relations, Need For Reciprocity

By Akbar Jan Marwat

EVER since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, Pakistan has been leading efforts to persuade the international community, especially the US to maintain a working relationship with the new Afghan regime.

But is Pakistan getting the required reciprocal support from the Afghan Taliban in dealing with the TTP and some other terrorist organizations? The short answer to this question is that: The Afghan Taliban are not giving Pakistan the kind of support which Pakistan expected.

The Afghan Taliban had promised that nobody would be allowed to use Afghan territory for terrorist activities against any other country.

The Afghan Taliban have, however, not taken any action against TTP, in spite of clear proofs that they have targeted Pakistani security agencies lately. The best that the Afghan Taliban have done is, to advise Pakistan to hold negotiations with the TTP under the mediation of Haqani Group.

On 16 and 17 December 2021, an extraordinary session of the organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministries was held in Islamabad on Pakistan's initiative. The situation in neighbouring Afghanistan was discussed exhaustively.

This was Pakistan's major initiative to not only involve the 57-member OIC body but also get observer delegation from the United States, China, Russia and the EU. The session decided on a Humanitarian Trust Fund and Food Security Program to deal with the rapidly worsening food crisis in Afghanistan.

Pakistani Prime Minister spoke at the extraordinary session and warned the world that, unless immediate measures were taken Afghanistan could become the biggest "man-made crises" in the world.

Imran Khan's warning is confirmed by the recent assessments put out by the United Nations to relevant bodies regarding the crises unfolding in Afghanistan.

Relief efforts for the starving people of Afghanistan is, of course, urgent and essential. But at the same time, certain promises that the interim Taliban regime made to the international community must also be fulfilled.

It was also expected by the international community that Pakistan would play a role in making sure that these commitments by the Taliban regime reach fruition.

Many of the promises by the Taliban regime have not been kept, the way the international community and Pakistan expected.

While there is a token representation of non-Pushtoon ethnic representation in the government, the regime has not in any meaningful way reached out to other ethnic minorities and the women. Thus there seems to be no process of ensuring their rights and participation in the political process.

It is also of some concern to the international community how the Taliban leaders interpret the concepts of women's rights and inclusiveness. These concepts clearly fall short of International norms and standards.

The interim Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Muttaqi, hardened this suspicion, when he said at the OIC session, "We as a representative and responsible government of the Afghan people consider human rights, women rights and participation by all capable Afghans from various regions our duty".

But he went on to add that, "a very effective decree was announced by the leader of the Islamic Emirate about the rights of women which shall prove instrumental in giving them their rights".

According to Afghanistan, women rights groups; while declaring women 'free' no mention is made of their right to education and professional work and was dismissed by some Afghan women activists as: "Posturing intended for international community not Afghan Women."

It is clear that the world wants the Taliban government to accept and act according to international standards in granting inclusivity to women and other minorities, in Afghanistan.

Once these conditions are met, will the West think about granting legitimately and help, in ameliorating the conditions prevailing in Afghanistan.

Pakistan in its eagerness to help Afghanistan, is urging the West to de-link these pre-conditions, in providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. For Pakistan, the provision of humanitarian and food aid to Afghanistan is also linked to two other important issues.

These issues are the large influx of refugees from Afghanistan, in case of acute food shortage and associated problem of terrorism, which could enter Pakistan along with refugees.

The Taliban government in Kabul, in spite of Pakistan's all-encompassing help is not even prepared to accept the reality of the Pak-Afghan border called the Durand Line.

The Taliban government has refused to accept the Durand Line as a *de jure* border, on the pretext, that the border was demarcated by the Colonial British Power with the then Amir of Afghanistan, Abdul Rehman Khan, who was apparently under duress to accept the arrangement. The border issue is lingering on to this day, underlining Afghanistan's irredentist claim to Pakistan's territory.

Several days ago, the Taliban fighters took away rolls of barbed wire, which Pakistani soldiers were using to erect a fence on our side of the borders. It is said that Pakistan, in order to diffuse the situation, agreed to a consensual approach for setting up the fence.

This in my opinion is wrong, as it is tantamount to compromising our sovereignty on our side of border.

As mentioned above, Afghanistan has not even kept its word, regarding use of force against various group of militants present on Afghan Soil, and indulging in terrorist activities against Pakistan.

These militant groups include the TTP; Baloch conglomerate Baloch Raji Aajoos Sangar (BRAS) and Islamic state – Khorasan. It is quite disconcerting that Afghanistan in behaving in such a nonchalant manner against Pakistan, which is doing so much for its neighbour.

Some scholars believe that it would be naïve to expect from Afghan Taliban to use force against TTP, as both have same DNA and world-view.

It seems Pakistan's generosity knows no limits, as far as Afghanistan is concerned, as recently it allowed Afghan trucks carrying Indian wheat through its country.

Now this may be a one-time ask on part of the Afghan Taliban but there always seems to be the possibility by the Afghan Taliban, to use the Indian card, whenever the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are strained. The Afghan Taliban advice to Pakistan to negotiate with the TTP is certainly a very bad idea.

This idea is tantamount with talking to murders and killers of innocent Pakistanis, besides being a non-starter as TTP's previous record amply shows. No doubt these negotiations did not get anywhere, in spite of undue enthusiasm shown by our Prime Minister.

In conclusion, Pakistan is doing the correct and neighbourly thing, by trying to engage with the world, to ameliorate the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. But at the same time, Pakistan has to pressurize Afghanistan not to have a nonchalant attitude about the issues which are of existential importance to Pakistan.

The Taliban regime must clearly recognize the centuries-old Durand Line and more importantly, as per its promise, it must use coercive force against the TTP, and stop it from using Afghan territory as a launching pad of terrorist activities against Pakistan.

—The writer, based in Islamabad, is a former Health Minister of KP.

Source: Published in pakobserver

National Security Policy By Dr Tehmina Aslam Ranjha

On 27 December, 2021, at the occasion of the 36th meeting of the National Security Council headed by the Prime Minister, members of the council approved the first National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26, presented by National Security Advisor Dr Moeed Yusuf, who also announced that the document was a product of consultative efforts that had been done earnestly with both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders since 2014, after the establishment of the National Security Division (NSD).

As per the news, the NSP was designed to “leverage the symbiotic relationship between human security, economic security and military security with the prosperity and safety of citizens as its principal focus.” Though the public version of the document is yet to be released, the news offers a three-pronged insight into the NSP.

First, the NSP is citizen-oriented. The foremost idea embedded in the policy is to shift Pakistan’s focus from an individualised sector-based agenda to a comprehensive national security framework the ultimate objective of which is to ensure the safety and security of citizens. The policy has acknowledged that without the economic prosperity of a common citizen, the country’s security cannot yield the desired fruit. This is why the policy promotes a citizen-centric approach to security in general, with economic security at the core.

A mob ready to lynch anyone and burn the victim’s corpse on mere allegations of blasphemy offers a matching insuperable threat to internal security.

The policy is unique in the sense that it treasures Pakistan’s citizens, the safety, security, dignity, welfare and prosperity of whom is considered vital to and inextricably linked to the country’s security. Interestingly, the policy has been rolled out at a time when the country is beset with economic hurdles to the smooth running of its affairs. Inflation is soaring, prices are skyrocketing, and savings are plummeting. The prevalent economic slump is the first major challenge to the policy the moment the policy starts seeing daylight. With distressed and disgruntled citizenry, the NSP evades its mainstay.

Second, the NSP emphasises economy, or in a broader way, geo-economics. Certainly, a robust economy is required to generate additional resources which could be doled out to the masses equally and judiciously to embolden human and military security. Further, it is expected that prioritising economic security would expand the national resource share for greater investments in human and military security.

Since 1991, Pakistan has taken about three decades to value the relevance of geo-economics substituting geo-politics. In the past, Pakistan overemphasised its geo-strategic position more in terms of geo-politics than geo-economics. One of the drawbacks to such an approach had been to Pakistan, which never considered seriously any prospects to enter into trade with neighbouring countries, especially India. Though constrained by the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement of 1993 and the South Asian Free Trade Area (an agreement reached in Islamabad on 6 January 2004) at the platform of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Pakistan remained reluctant to open its trade with India. Nevertheless, transnational projects such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor have made Pakistan realise the untapped potential for using its geo-strategy under the rubric of geo-economics. The related challenges are that Pakistan's economy is still short of being export-oriented and that Pakistan is disinclined to do trade in the region.

One of the major objections to the 18th Constitutional Amendment is that the share of the Centre has been decreasing, thereby putting the Centre under pressure to service debt, bear the expanses of the armed forces and meet the expenditures of the capital, Islamabad. One solution was sought in reversing the amendment by either judicial activation or incumbent parliament. Neither of them could work. The second solution lies in expanding the national resource base to generate a bigger economy that could sustain the ever-growing expenses of the four provinces and dwindling but otherwise vital expenses of the Center. The NSP seems to be a step in this direction.

Third, the NSP policy elucidates a framework to handle external and internal security challenges. External adversaries, such as India, may offer a threat, as India is bent on mimicking the US in adopting the strategy of pre-emptive strikes. Nevertheless, external foes are known but internal detractors are amorously rearing their heads in several forms.

One can take refuge in the argument that internal threat is vaguely posed by amorphous groups resorting to the menace of terrorism. Nevertheless, the challenge is that religious extremists are in abundance inside the country. Mainstreaming religious elements, who are inclined to enter politics, might be one strategy, but this strategy is flawed with the weaponization of politics. The NSP is silent on this aspect. Moreover, it is not only the Taliban-type militia that poses a threat to internal security, the mob ready to lynch anyone and burn the victim's corpse on mere allegations of blasphemy also offers a matching insuperable threat to internal security. The NSP keeps mum on this facet too. The added problem emanates from the unchecked population growth rate, which has been around two per cent in Pakistan, compared to around one per cent population growth rate of Bangladesh in 2020-21. The untoward consequences of overpopulation are both fathomable and foreseeable. The NSP stands short of addressing this feature as well.

At the meeting, though the NSD was tasked to review the progress on the policy every year to keep the policy updated as per the emerging global environment, it is yet to be seen if the policy is merely to do window dressing of issues or reach the core of the problems such as illiteracy, poverty, extremism and overpopulation ravaging the country. Similarly, at the meeting, members from the opposition parties remained conspicuous by their absence. This is where the problem lies: any next government comprising today's opposition parties may put a damper on all the excitement invoked in redirecting Pakistan. It would have been both expedient and propitious if the government had taken the opposition into confidence and persuaded it to send its representative to the meeting – to envision the new bright future of Pakistan together.

The writer is an analyst on national security and foreign policy. She tweets at @TA_Ranjha.

Source: Published in Daily Times

Changing Middle East and Pakistan:

Opportunities on the Horizon By Shazia

Anwer Cheema

We are at the beginning of the year 2022 and it seems like that ice is breaking in the Middle East and after decade-long tense relations, Middle Eastern economic powers are joining hands again and mitigating their differences.

In the last year, Middle Eastern theatre has changed drastically. In January 2022 we got the news that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Saudi Arabia in February 2022. Just a year ago, on January 5, 2021, we witnessed the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, visiting Saudi Arabia for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit followed by the signing of an agreement to restore diplomatic relations between Qatar and the Saudi-led bloc comprising the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. This change was the end of the five-year long diplomatic deadlock of Qatar.

On November 24, 2021, President Erdogan hosted Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Ankara in what was the latter's first visit to Turkey after 2012. Diplomatic relations between Turkey and the UAE went through a turbulent patch due to major differences and their contradictory positions over Arab Spring, Muslim Brotherhood, Libyan civil war, Syrian war, and Qatar embargo. Turkey was the only country in the region that stood with Qatar when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, the Maldives, Mauritania, Senegal, Djibouti, Comoros, Jordan and Libya severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and blocked its airspace and sea routes in June 2017.

Now Qatar and Saudi Arabia are working again to establish a rail link that would connect the two countries. Last week, Qatari Minister of Transport Jassim Al-Sulaiti and his Saudi counterpart Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser held discussions regarding aspects of cooperation in the fields of transportation, civil aviation, ports and railways. Aljazeera reported that the proposed rail link project was expected to be launched back in 2016 before it was abandoned due to the diplomatic crisis between the two states.

I believe that Middle Eastern economic giants now understand that the age of imposing regional hegemonies are a bygone idea because Qatar boosted its economy and diplomatic position when it was physically isolated from neighbouring countries. Turkey despite the horrific Syrian war at its borders has become the hub of information technology and high technological productions while Iran despite sanctions and embargoes not only survived but has become an integral part of Chinese vision in the region. There is no doubt that Middle Eastern wars ruined Syria, Iraq and Libya but someone else out of the Middle East was the beneficiary of these wars while the Middle East got nothing but terrorism, large-scale migrations and asylum-seeking youth.

Pakistan's foreign policy has always been proactive in the Middle East because situated at the crossroads, Pakistan links South Asia with Central Asia and the Middle East via Iran. Turbulence in the Middle East has never been favorable to Pakistan, therefore it had been trying to bridge Middle Eastern countries by mitigating differences between and among brotherly countries.

Since 2016, Pakistan had been facing critical situations and trying to keep a balance among Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and other GCC countries after Qatar was virtually cut off and isolated by Saudi Arabia. Syrian, Iraqi and Libyan wars turned the situation complex further when Saudi Arabia and Turkey stood against each other, putting Pakistan into a difficult situation as it has good relation with both. Pakistan tried to play its role to neutralise the situation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Now things are becoming favourable for Pakistan when after a tug of war-like situation, Middle Eastern countries are normalising their relations.

This situation is an excellent opportunity for Pakistan to place itself at the diplomatic centre stage of the Middle East. Pakistan, Iran and Turkey have already initiated a cargo railway project and the first cargo train from Islamabad left the station for Istanbul in December 2021. Shall we not go for developing a workable economic vision pooling human resources offered by Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar for a better future of our generations to come? I think we can do it now.

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A Cooperative Mechanism For Pak-Iran Ties

By Prof Dr Muhammad Khan

HISTORICALLY, Pakistan and Iran share geographical contiguity, religious affinity, culture similarities and civilizational closeness.

For centuries, the area now constituting Pakistan remained the hub of the Indo-Persian civilization that produced remarkable works of art, poetry, literature and great intellect.

After the creation of Pakistan, the natural affinity and closeness shared by these two neighbours was enhanced further and mutual ties of both flourished to new heights. Traditionally Pakistani frontiers with Iran have always been peaceful, safe and secure. Iran was the first country which recognized Pakistan upon its emergence as an independent country in 1947.

Indeed, there have been historical linkages between the people of Pakistan and Iran. Centuries ago Iranian migrants and Islamic preachers left long lasting impression on the people and civilization of Indian Sub-continent.

In the historical perspective, Iran had its security concerns arising from the expansionist designs of former Soviet Union and an uneasy relationship with Arab world, therefore, emergence of a non-Arab Muslim country (Pakistan) in its neighbourhood provided it respite and reinforced its security.

Whereas, Pakistan, otherwise agonized over by Indian aggression and hostile Afghanistan, took Iran as its strategic partner and Iranian soil as its strategic depth. Iran, indeed demonstrated this by providing all out assistance to Pakistan during 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars. First Pakistani Premier Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan visited Iran in 1949 and Iranian Shah reciprocated in 1950, as the first foreign head of state. Thereafter both countries maintained their bilateral relationship in an atmosphere of Islamic brotherhood and as good neighbours, with mutual acceptability.

Pakistan along with Iran and Turkey established Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD), an inter-governmental organization for socio-economic development in the member countries in 1964.

The organization was renamed as Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1985 and its membership increased to ten in early 1990s with the integration of Central Asian States, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan.

Following the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, Pakistan was the first country, which recognized Revolutionary Iranian Government. Besides sending a high-level delegation under Foreign Minister, then President, General Zia ul Haq himself, visited Iran as a good will gesture in 1980 and 1981. During Iran-Iraq war, Pakistan made hectic efforts to negotiate a deal between the two Islamic countries to end the war.

In early 1990s, there developed minor divergences between Iran and Pakistan over the interim setup in Afghanistan upon withdrawal of Soviet Union and later on the issue of the support to Taliban by Pakistan and Northern Alliance by Iran.

Besides, the regional and global forces also tried to exploit their bilateral relationship on various pretexts. Nevertheless, Pakistan continued maintaining its brotherly relations with Iran and on a number of occasions, pushed it towards reconciliation and shunning the differences.

Pakistan whole-heartedly supported Iranian viewpoint on the issue of its nuclear programme and maintained that Iran has the right to develop its nuclear programme within the ambit of NPT.

The commendable aspects of the Pak-Iran relationship are such that, even during the tense decade of 1990s, there has never been a diplomatic impasse in their bilateral relationship. In order to improve the bilateral relationship, former President General Pervaiz Musharraf visited Iran in December 1999.

On that occasion, Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, declared the relationship between the countries as, "profound and unbreakable, noting the two countries' common cultural and Islamic foundations. Earlier in May 1998, upon Indian nuclear tests, Iran showed its concern and President Khatami in a statement

said that; “We regard your security seriously and understand your position and the position of our brother, Pakistani nation.

In 2016, immediately after the tense relationship between Iran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, then Pakistani Prime Minister, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif visited Tehran and Riyadh.

Pakistani leadership tried to convince Saudi and Iranian leadership that, strained relationship and proxies would not be in the benefit of any of these countries and Muslim World. Their mutual differences would allow the external forces to further exploit them, thus causing instability to the region.

In November, 2017 Pakistani Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Tehran and had an indepth discussion with Iranian Military leadership for the peace and stability of the region. General Bajwa also persuaded Iranian leadership to play a greater role for ‘regional solution to the 16-year-long conflict in Afghanistan.’

It is worth mentioning that, Iran issued statements in favour of Pakistan after Trump accused Islamabad on Afghan issue. To reciprocate the visit of General Bajwa, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri along with a high powered military delegation visited Pakistan in July 2018.

About Afghanistan, both countries consider that, people of Afghanistan should have right to decide their future as per their own wishes. The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021 is being viewed critically both by Tehran and Islamabad.

Both are making efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. On the eve of OIC foreign ministers extra ordinary meeting at Islamabad on December 19, 2021, the Iranian Foreign Minister Mr Hossein Amir Abdollahian had an indepth meeting with Pakistani leadership including the Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa.

Mr Hossein reiterated cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad on all bilateral issues including the border security, fighting terrorism and export of electricity and gas to Pakistan.

As a way forward, there is need that, academia, think tanks and media must play a role to bring Iran and Pakistan further closer to each other.

Scholars must visit each other's country more frequently. The existing level of people-to-people contact must be enhanced for the development of confidence among the masses.

The platform of the ECO should be mobilized for the regional interaction, economic harmony, and overall prosperity of the region. Besides, the existing low profiled confidence building measures between Iran and Pakistan needs to be enhanced for a broader collaboration by devising a permanent multi-dimensional cooperative mechanism.

— The writer is Professor of Politics and IR at International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak obeserver

Pakistan in The Evolving World Order By

Ayaz Ahmed

THE ill-planned American withdrawal from Afghanistan and its pivot to the Indo-Pacific region is indicative of a seismic shift in the evolving world order.

When a declining and wounded superpower wraps up its unfinished agenda and shifts its centre of strategic attention to another region, other states situated in the backyard should stand alert, closely monitor its policies and steer a well-thought-out path to safeguard their national interests.

In hindsight, Pakistan bore the brunt of such a perilous situation in the 1990s when America had bid adieu to the region after the crushing fall of bulky Soviet Union; its consequences still reverberate in political and security circles of the country.

Since the 1990s, the world order has been exclusively dominated and moulded by Uncle Sam; Washington attained this prerogative after its defeat of the Soviet Union in the Afghan war.

At that time, communist China didn't present a formidable threat to the US as Beijing was deeply engaged in silently entrenching its economic power at home and spreading its soft power across the border .

So, the US didn't sense the need to be preoccupied with the thought of the Thucydides Trap against China. However, the rapid pre-eminence of China on the world stage has made the US apprehensive of losing its venerated status as ' the sole super power'.

Presumably, when an arrogant superpower thinks of losing its invincible power, it likely make desperate attempts to disturb the security of key regions of the world. Therefore, Pakistan should brace itself because the American ongoing tug of war against China will badly hurt Pakistan's febrile economy and fragile security.

The economy has always remained a major flank of any world order. In the contemporary world, neo-liberal world order is somehow prevalent with free trade, globalization, de-regulation, and privatization as its major principles.

It is an open secret that the US single-handedly controls the crumbling levers of the economic aspect of the existing world order. Moreover, the US exerts increasing influence over the lending organizations such as the IMF and the WB.

To put it economically for Pakistan, American withdrawal from Afghanistan has turned out to be obstructive for Islamabad; the IMF has hardened its bargain chip with Pakistan by tightening conditionalities around the nose of it, hence putting Pakistan's anaemic economy on the ventilator and exacting a heavy price on the masses in the shape of unbearable inflation.

Secondly, though American pivot to Asia and its Indo-Pacific strategy are geared to contain Chinese economic growth and military rise, Pakistan cannot escape the telling aftershocks of such policies.

Washington has systematically afforded a leading role to India – Pakistan's arch rival – in placing formidable hurdles in the way of Chinese expansion of hard power in East and South Asia. Giving India a significant role in the Quad alliance substantiates this point.

New Delhi has cashed in on its alignment with America and the West by receiving, inter alia, geo-spatial technology, Rafale aircraft, nuclear technology, and the latest surveillance drones from Israel. Inevitably, this has made supremacists-dominated India dangerously overconfident of its hard power.

The Modi government felt emboldened to conduct ill-conceived surgical strikes on Pakistani territory in 2019, blatantly violating international law. Luckily, sanity prevailed on the part of Pakistan and it, therefore, didn't let the situation veer into a nasty conflict.

Interestingly, to cover up its role as a spoiler in Afghanistan and stage a comeback, India is striving to make a diplomatic stint by inviting NSA level meeting in New Delhi on Nov 10. The US stands behind India in this initiative.

Ominously, when a rising power led by a populist government gains military power and all-out diplomatic support from the leading states of the world, it dares to conduct more and more such military misadventures against its foe; abortive

attempts of Indian submarines to seep into Pakistan waters is largely illustrative of hawkish policies of the Modi government against Pakistan.

Thirdly, there is no doubt that the twenty-first century is also the century of multibillion economic corridors. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the major connectivity projects in the South Asian region.

The corridor has been in the throes of a spate of militant and insurgent attacks in recent months. These attacks increased in number and intensity after America had signed the deal with the Taliban in early 2019.

The ghastly attacks on Chinese engineers this year working on the Daso Hydro Power Project ended up putting a brack on some key projects of CPEC. An anti-China militant outfit was found to be involved in the attacks. When American operations were in full swing in Afghanistan, Washington didn't take stringent actions to dismantle the sanctuaries of this group in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the US is likely to ensure that Pakistan does not service Chinese loans through the bail-out packages received from the IMF. US policymakers have always made sure that Pakistan does not pay its Chinese loans from money provided by the IMF. More worrisome is the likely upsurge in insurgent attacks on the CPEC projects in Baluchistan; one cannot deny the destabilizing role of India in sponsoring insurgency in Balochistan.

Pakistan ill-affords to adopt an ostrich-centric approach by half-heartedly treating these emerging threats out of the brewing world order.

The government should not put the entire state machinery behind fixing the issues of rising inflation and internal political instability caused by recent protests by a religio-political party; the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Finance should be tasked with dealing these pressing issues. After all, these are constitutional duties of both ministries.

One cannot flatly deny the fact that the country direly lacks a team so that it can make vibrant and proactive foreign policies in a timely fashion and effectively deal with rapid shifts in regional and global politics. Therefore, it is time to grasp the contours of the changing global order and hammer out well-thought-out policies to deal with these dynamics.

The country's foreign minister and his team are supposed to learn and hone the art of soft power and diplomacy to win hearts across the border, especially across the Atlantic Ocean.

—The writer is former senior researcher at the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (PIIA) and now an editor and commentator based in Karachi.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Pakistan's Strategic Construct — Some Thoughts By Inam Ul Haque

Powerful countries like the US, China and Russia have what military theorists call a 'Grand Strategy' and 'other' strategies including a Military Strategy. Strategies fall below policies in the modern state hierarchy. The strategic concept is amorphous and highly changeable from discipline to discipline. In purely military parlance, devising, implementing and sustaining strategies and grand strategies are highly complex phenomenon. Grand strategy (GS) and strategy are in essence, interrelationship and interface between means, ways and ends. Simply put, strategy is the employment of 'means' in optimum 'ways' to achieve the desired 'ends'/objectives. Juggling with always limited means (essentially all elements of a nation's power potential), to achieve desired end-state(s) is essentially an art as well as a science.

Strategy requires a logic, and logic generally rests upon assumptions; so, if assumptions are not sufficiently examined, the consequent strategy stands on weaker footings. An experienced strategist would always do due diligence to ensure that resources at hand are sufficient for the desired goals, once employed in optimal ways. 'Tactics and operations', going from lower to higher levels, deal with the employment of these resources (ways). In military phraseology, 'tactics' and 'operations' are subservient to strategy, hence the notion that strategic blunder cannot be corrected by tactical brilliance...an erstwhile divergence between the US and UK's military thought process.

A Grand Strategy not only entails the employment of a nation's own power potential (like military, economic, industrial, political, geographic, IT/media power, etc), it also brings in the commensurate powers of its allies and alliances (diplomacy in particular). Strategy, on the other hand, is more national in outlook and character. US/NATO strategies in the recent conflicts (Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria) were hence, grand strategies just like their erstwhile strategies in the World Wars. A GS influences and shapes regional and/or global landscape.

As per Clausewitz's (1780-1831) theorem, 'war is the continuation of policy by other means', therefore, its practitioners — civil and military alike — should be schooled properly in its complexities. Politicians should have a working knowledge

of the military, especially the shortfalls of its employment in complex political environment and its 'bluntness', and they should avoid the temptation of over-using the military; and the military hierarchy should be sensitive to political considerations and limitations of the politicians, democracy and political process. Any disconnect leads to fiascoes like the Afghan war (2001-2021). It is said that war is too serious a business to be left to the generals alone.

In theory, and as espoused by the NDU Islamabad, Pakistan's overarching construct begins with a 'National Purpose'... the *raison d'être*, or the very reason for which Pakistan exists. I will define it, "A separate homeland for Muslims fearing persecution in a Hindu India." That purpose today stands validated, given the situation of Indian Muslims and Kashmiris in the Indian Union, under Modi's RSS/Hindutva-laced rule.

The government translates the national purpose into concrete 'National Interests' (vital to peripheral, permanent to changing, primary to secondary, etc). Functions of 'National Interest' are translated into 'National Aims and Objectives'. The ensuing 'National Policy', thereafter, blends national purpose and interests into actionable national objectives and guidance.

National Security Policy (NSP) generally enjoys primacy. It is heartening to see the recently released NSP-1/2022-2026 identifying just and peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute as 'a vital national security interest'.

Policy dominates strategy and each policy has to have a corresponding strategy. Whereas, policy 'is a deliberate statement of objectives and guidance', a strategy involves working plans across the envisioned spectrum of policy. Hence, the NSP would lead to other policies and strategies like economic, foreign affairs, trade and commerce, IT/media and internal policies and strategies, etc. The NSP would transcend into 'Defence Policy' (DP) and DP would end up into a 'Military Strategy', from where the respective Service Strategies would emanate.

Good to see that the process that started essentially by Dr Moeed Yusuf, the NSA, with Islamabad Security Dialogue (ISD) in March 2021 did not fizzle out. I had then alluded to Pakistan departing from the traditional notions of 'national security' towards 'a more inclusive security construct' comprising "economic progress, technological advancement, regional connectivity, knowledge entrenchment, and political stability." Gen Bajwa had summed up the ISD highlighting the need for

contemporary national security construct as citizen-centric “providing a conducive environment in which aspirations of human security, national progress and development could be realized.” One hopes that the official document of the NSP-1 contains the national strategic construct, as outlined above in entirety, having deliberated particularly upon our national interests, other than Kashmir.

To sum up the above debate; importantly, after identifying the NP (separate homeland due to existential fears), Kashmir resolution, peaceful neighborhood, human resource development, economic, organisational and infrastructural development, full-spectrum deterrence, debt retirement, domestic peace and stability, regional commerce/connectivity, freedom from terrorism plugging the many fault lines, could be ‘some’ of our national interests. Rule of law, strong defence, social and religious harmony, effective governance and regional trade could be ‘some’ of national objectives. And with the NSP out, the national security strategy could be debated.

Although smaller than most traditional powers, Pakistan can have a Grand Strategy, given its crucial location (at the seam of Central, South and West Asia), younger demographics, nuclear deterrence and alliance-power... being a bridge between Islamic and non-Islamic Worlds...a status it would ultimately acquire, negativity by the arm-chair intellectuals notwithstanding. Our ‘suggested’ GS could, therefore, be “while protecting ideological and territorial integrity, remain ‘positively relevant’ in the international system working diplomatically around problems, where Pakistan and the regional/global interests do not converge, owing to dictates of a changeable given environment.”

Pakistan was carved out of the erstwhile and competing Afghan, Indian and Iranian Empires alongside strong Central Asian influences. So, a strong Centre with credible defence capability remains our ‘centre of gravity (COG)’. However, economic prosperity, following a regional approach (through extended CPEC, SAARC, etc) ‘as an outer layer of our security’ is the ‘only’ panacea to dissolve our multifarious national fault lines, ensure peace and prosperity, and guarantee defence. Without building regional stakes in our security/stability, Pakistan would continue to remain a security state with lopsided economic expense and a military-dominant decision-making process. NSP-1 seems cognizant.

One hopes, the process of formulating national strategic construct, ushered in by the publication of NSP, is followed through, despite its many imperfections.

Published in The Express Tribune, January 20th, 2022.

Is the NFC Award Sustainable? By Farrukh Saleem

How should revenues be distributed between the Federation and the Provinces? Consideration number 1: We need a financially functional federal system. Consideration number 2: We need a resource distribution formula that is fair, equitable and, most importantly, sustainable. Consideration number 3: The resource distribution mechanism must be dynamic. Consideration number 4: The resource distribution procedure must be flexible.

Under Article 160 of the Constitution, “Within six months of the commencing day and thereafter at intervals not exceeding five years, the President shall constitute a National Finance Commission consisting of the Minister of Finance of the Federal Government, the Ministers of Finance of the Provincial Governments, and such other persons as may be appointed by the President after consultation with Governors of the Provinces.”

The National Finance Commission Awards have a rather checkered history. In 1974, the 1st NFC Award under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was conclusive. In 1979, the 2nd and the 3rd NFC Awards under Zia-ul-Haq remained inconclusive. In 1991, the 4th NFC Award under Nawaz Sharif was conclusive. In 1995, the 5th NFC Award remained inconclusive. In 2002, the 6th NFC Award under Pervez Musharraf was inconclusive.

On 18 March 2010, the 7th NFC Award-under Yousaf Raza Gillani-was announced under which “the share of Provinces in vertical distribution has been increased from 49% to 56% during 2010-11 and 57.5% during the remaining years of the Award. The traditional population based criteria for horizontal distribution of resources amongst the Provinces has been changed to Multiple-Criteria Formula. According to this criteria 82% distribution was made on population, 10.3% on poverty and backwardness, 5% revenue collection/generation, and 2.7% on inverse population density (IPD).” Punjab’s percentage of share on the basis of the 7th NFC Award is 51.74%, Sindh 24.55%, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 14.62% and Baluchistan 9.09%.

The 8th NFC Award under Nawaz Sharif also remained inconclusive. The 9th National Finance Commission also failed to conclude. The maiden meeting of the 10th National Finance Commission is scheduled to take place in February.

Is the NFC Award sustainable? Budget 2021-22 estimates 'FBR Collection' of Rs5.8 trillion of which Rs3.3 trillion is to be paid out to the provinces under the NFC Award. The Federation is thus left with Rs2.5 trillion. Budget 2021-22 expects 'Non-Tax Revenue' of Rs2 trillion leaving the Federation with a total of Rs4.5 trillion.

Of the Rs4.5 trillion left with the Federation, the Federation has to pay Rs3 trillion in 'debt servicing' and Rs1.4 trillion for 'defense'. After 'debt servicing' and 'defense' the Federation is left with next-to-nothing. The Federation must therefore borrow to cover the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) Rs900 billion; borrow to cover Pensions of Rs480 billion; borrow to cover Running of the Civil Government of Rs479 billion; borrow to cover Subsidies of Rs682 billion and borrow even more to cover Grants of Rs1.2 trillion.

To be certain, the Rs3 trillion in 'debt service payments' are made on debt taken by the State of Pakistan, not just Islamabad. Yes, the Rs1.4 trillion for 'defense' is to defend the State of Pakistan, not just Islamabad. Then there's the multi-billion dollar Covid-19 vaccine procurement and other unforeseen natural calamities like floods, locust attack and earthquakes.

Clearly, the resource distribution formula under the 7th NFC Award is neither fair nor sustainable. The 18th Amendment made the Award rather inflexible-and that has resulted in a financially non-functional federal system. The need of the hour is to revisit the entire resource distribution mechanism, including the formula. To be sure, the Provinces currently have no incentive to revisit. The need of the hour is to incentivize the Provinces to assist the Federation in revenue generation rather than just laying back and collecting trillions under the NFC Award.

A revisit is a must. A consensus-based revisit will be ideal-but a revisit for a sustainable NFC Award is the only way out of this financial quagmire.

Source: Published in Dawn

Pakistan-China Relations: The Journey of Friendship By Imran Khan

The Pakistan-China partnership is unparalleled among inter-state relations. The history of our friendship is a unique account of unwavering mutual support, mutual trust and mutual respect. Nurtured by successive generations of our leadership and peoples across seven decades, this iron-brotherhood has blossomed into a strong and vibrant All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership.

Our relationship is time-tested and timeless; it transcends the normal precepts of inter-state relations and has withstood the vicissitudes of regional and global developments. The grand celebrations to mark the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic ties last year helped in injecting a new vigor and vitality to our friendship.

For us in Pakistan, relations with China are the cornerstone of our foreign policy enjoying support across the political spectrum. I can say with great confidence that our people fully understand the real value of this friendship and enthusiastically contribute to its splendor and glory. No wonder special metaphors have been coined to illustrate its depth and intensity; the expression Ba Tie only reserved for Pakistanis in China is one such example.

Portugal's ruling Socialist party wins outright majority in snap general elections

In the next few days, I will be arriving in Beijing to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games. Being a sportsman myself, I can very well relate to the spirit that sporting events like Olympics instill in a nation. I strongly feel that sports should be a unifying factor and should transcend politics. I congratulate the leadership and people of China for hosting this mega event and wish all participants safe, healthy and successful games.

Since my last visit to China in October 2019, the world has undergone a profound transformation. COVID-19, the biggest contemporary challenge, continues to negatively impact lives and livelihoods across the globe. Climate change is yet another monster staring down our eyes with the potential to disrupt all that humankind has achieved to date.

The imperatives of geopolitics have engendered new alignments in our region, which to many, are reminiscent of ideological confrontation of the last century. Instability and turmoil that plagued Afghanistan for the past 20 years have come close with a hope of peace finally returning to the region. The international community's engagement is essential to avoid an economic meltdown and avert a humanitarian crisis in that country.

The present challenges, colossal as they be, nevertheless stress the need for international cooperation and call for rekindling the spark of multilateralism for peace and prosperity in our region and beyond. As President Xi Jinping pertinently mentioned in his recent address to World Economic Forum,

“Amidst the raging torrents of global crisis, countries are not riding separately in some 190 small boats, but are rather all in a giant ship on which our shared destiny hinges”.

History bears witness to the fact that Pakistan and China have jointly traversed such epochal changes in the past and emerged successful. Our two countries have always supported each other on matters of core national interests.

It is our common vision that enduring peace in South Asia is contingent on maintaining a strategic balance in the region and all outstanding issues like border questions and the Kashmir dispute should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy and as per norms of international law.

PM being 'secretly' supported by 14-15 Opposition lawmakers, Sheikh Rashid claims

Our bilateral cooperation against COVID-19 further validates the strength of our friendship. As iron brothers, Pakistan solidly stood by China after the outbreak of the pandemic. From President Arif Alvi's solidarity visit to Beijing to the dispatch of over 60 plane loads of Chinese anti-epidemic goods to Pakistan, emerged a shining example of mutual support and goodwill. Chinese vaccines have now become the mainstay of Pakistan's ongoing mass vaccination drive.

Pakistan is charting a new path for robust and sustainable development and making efforts to harness its potential as a geo-economics hub. The new National

Security Policy of Pakistan centers on my government's vision of a people-centric approach for ensuring their prosperity, fundamental rights and social justice.

In pursuance of these objectives, we draw inspiration from China's achievements; be it the miraculous lifting of 800 million people out of absolute poverty or victory in people's war against the pandemic.

UN Security Council 'unified' against any Russian distraction: US

As a friend, neighbor and partner, Pakistan has much to offer to the people, enterprises and business persons of China. Pakistan has a rich history, cultural diversity and majestic landscapes. With a population of 220 million people, young and skilled labor force, strategic location, friendly investment regime and warm sentiments for the Chinese people, Pakistan welcomes you for your next investment and next leisure trip.

China has lately become Pakistan's largest trade and investment partner. Bilateral trade reached historic levels in 2021. Many Chinese enterprises have established a strong presence in Pakistan and are contributing to our socio-economic growth. China can become a huge market for Pakistan's livestock and agricultural products. Similarly, Pakistan can benefit from Chinese expertise in industrialization, agricultural modernization, e-commerce and digital finance.

Pakistan is one of the earliest participants of President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative. As the flagship project of the BRI, CPEC has immense economic and strategic significance for our two countries. There is complete consensus in Pakistan on CPEC's indispensability for Pakistan's national development. My government is fully committed to making CPEC a High Quality Demonstration Project of BRI.

CPEC has been instrumental in addressing Pakistan's chronic energy crisis and improving connectivity through infrastructure development. We are also making rapid progress on the development of Gwadar Port and Special Economic Zones which would benefit the entire region.

No quantum of development is meaningful unless its fruits trickle down to the underprivileged section of society. My vision therefore is aimed at rooting out poverty and empowering the people of Pakistan to become masters of their own destiny.

Phase-II of CPEC has therefore accordingly been designed for job creation, industrial modernization, livelihood improvement, rural revitalization, socio-economic development and poverty alleviation. Complementing these projects is my government's flagship initiative called "Ehsaas," a large social security network for poverty alleviation and upward social mobility.

Safety and security of Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan remains our top priority. Our people and state institutions are determined to safeguard CPEC from the detractors of Pakistan-China friendship and bring to justice those responsible for harming our interests.

It is heartening to note that China is leading the cause of mitigating climate change and restoring Mother Nature to its pristine beauty. We look forward to working with China to address climate change and undertake futuristic developments based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

My Clean and Green Initiative resonates with President Xi's vision of a "prosperous, clean and beautiful world." Pakistan is already in the midst of one of the world's most ambitious efforts to expand and restore its forests, having already planted a billion trees as part of the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami Project.

In the digital era where innovation and technology serve as the primary vehicle of sustainable and robust development, Pakistan is eager to enhance mutually beneficial cooperation with China in quantum computing, robotics, AI, Cloud, and Big Data.

Pakistan will also be working closely with China to advance the objectives of the Global Development Initiative put forward by President Xi Jinping.

Over the last few years, one of the most promising and reassuring aspects of our bilateral relations is increasing contacts between the peoples of our two countries. The warmth at the top echelons of leadership is mirrored by sentiments of love and fraternity between our masses. With over 40 provinces and cities sister relationships, I am confident that linkages between our peoples would deepen, and finest traditions of our friendship would be passed on to our future generations.

We are happy to see the Chinese people guided by the capable leadership of President Xi Jinping and the Communist Party of China for achieving the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

On behalf of the government and people of Pakistan, I would like to reaffirm that in Pakistan, China would always find a trusted friend which would stand by it, not only amidst the gentle tides of peace and prosperity but also in the rising storms of challenges.

In conveying to the Chinese leadership and the people, my best wishes for the Year of the Tiger and the Spring Festival. I hope that the sacred flame of Pakistan-China friendship will keep glowing with ever-increasing brightness and warmth!

Long Live Pakistan-China Friendship!

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Source: Published in The Nation

ECONOMY

As Gloomy Year Ends, 2022 Shows **‘Economic Uplift’ By Salman Siddiqui**

The country's economy unexpectedly entered into a relatively higher growth mode despite underperforming during the calendar year 2021.

The incentives-laden original budget presented in June 2021 for the current fiscal year set the stage for a further expansion in businesses and economy.

The stimulus package, the then low benchmark interest rate at 7%, slightly overvalued rupee and central bank measures to inject ample liquidity into the system through different schemes accelerated business and economic activities beyond expectations during the second half of the year 2021 -- July-December.

Accordingly, the economy became overheated with inflation reaching a 21-month high double digit at 11.5% in November 2021.

The import bill hit a record high of \$8 billion in the month, trade deficit widened to a record high at over \$5 billion and the current account deficit soared to a 40-month high at \$1.9 billion in the month.

The expansion in the economy beyond authorities' expectations during Jul-Dec 2021 (which is first half of current fiscal year 2022 as well) and significant rise in global commodity prices like petroleum products and LNG – which was a major cause of the surge in monthly import bill and current account deficit – started reducing foreign exchange reserves and caused notable depreciation of 17% (or around Rs26) in domestic currency to record low of Rs178.24 against the US dollar by December 29, 2021 compared with 22-month high of Rs152.27 in May 2021 in the inter-bank market.

The developments prompted the central bank to aggressively increase the benchmark interest rate by a cumulative 2.75 percentage points during Sep-Dec 2021 to 9.75% at present.

The targeted measure of the rate hike was aimed at controlling inflation, narrowing down the current account deficit and improving the balance of international payments.

At the same time, it helped limiting economic growth to pre-planned level of around 5% in the current fiscal year 2022 against the existing potential for higher economic growth.

"The growth of over 5.25-5.5% would damage the economy if taken in current fiscal year 2022," Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin had recently said.

Earlier, the country unexpectedly saw a jump in economic growth to 4% in the previous fiscal year 2021 against the contraction of 0.5% in the prior fiscal year 2020 amid Covid-19 pandemic.

The year 2021 also saw the International Monetary Fund (IMF) \$6 billion loan programme resuming in February 2021 after remaining on hold for the past one-year amid the pandemic.

The programme was again halted in June 2021 on difference between the government and IMF teams on the way to deal with the financial crisis in Pakistan.

Recently, the two sides reached a staff-level agreement in late November 2021 to resume the programme.

The IMF Board would be presented with the sixth review of the economy under the loan programme on January 12, 2022.

Accordingly, the IMF would release the next tranche of \$1 billion of the loan to Pakistan in January-February 2022.

This will be followed by raising foreign debt by selling Sukuk (Islamic bond) by the government in international market, other inflows from multilateral and bilateral lender and rollover of maturing foreign debt during the year 2022.

Such inflows are estimated to build up foreign exchange reserves by net \$1.3 billion to \$27.5 billion by end of June 2022 and help the rupee to partially recover ground against the US dollar in the inter-bank market during the year.

Now the nation has entered 2022 with the benchmark interest rate reaching close to its peak expected at 10% in March 2022.

The rupee partially recovered almost 1% (or Rs1.73) against the US dollar in the last two working days of December 2021 to Rs176.51 after losing to a record low of Rs178.24 on December 29, 2021.

The expected cut in the benchmark interest rate to 9.25% during second half of calendar year 2022 and stabilisation in the rupee-dollar parity at around Rs178 against the US dollar till end of June 2022 would reset the economy back to high growth mode from second quarter (April-June) of 2022 and onwards.

"The inflation reading is expected to slow down into single digit and current account deficit coming back into affordable range of \$600-800 per month from February-March 2022 and onwards," said Pak-Kuwait Investment Company Head of Research Samiullah Tariq.

However, Fahad Rauf, the head of research at Ismail Iqbal Securities, said the second half of 2022 might see increased political noise.

"This will be because political parties would start preparations for the next parliamentary poll expected in fourth quarter (October-December) of 2023," he added.

The preparations may prod the ruling PTI party to spend more on development projects and the masses to keep intact its vote bank.

The expected higher spending, however, might increase the deficit in fiscal year 2023, as the completion of IMF loan programme of \$6 billion in September 2022 (as per the original programme) would allow the government to increase spending beyond available resources.

The calendar year 2022 may see improvement in inflation, some appreciation in the rupee against the dollar and cut in current account deficit.

"However, "they (inflation, rupee-dollar parity and deficit) would remain elevated during 2022," Rauf added.

The next fiscal year 2023 is expected to record an economic growth of 5.4% compared to 5.2% estimated for ongoing fiscal year 2022, said Arif Habib Limited Head of Research Tahir Abbas.

Source: Published in Express Tribune

Measures to Address Pakistan's Economic Difficulties | By Col Muhammad Hanif (R)

AT the moment most of the Pakistanis are rightly concerned about the continuing devaluation of Pakistan's currency and rising prices/inflation in the country, for which the Government Ministers are trying to give justifications.

It is a well-known fact that the main reason for inflation is Pakistan's heavy foreign debt, which the Government is required to pay back in an annual instalment of 14 billion US dollars.

For this purpose, Pakistan has to further borrow from the friendly countries, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and mainly the IMF, because Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves are not sufficient to pay the annual loan instalments.

The IMF gives loans on hard terms, like increasing the prices and taxes, thus causing inflation and devaluation of the Pakistani rupee.

To understand that why Pakistan has to repay 14 billion US dollars' debt, including the interest annually, let us have a look at the position of Pakistan's total foreign borrowing in the last 32 years, due to which by the end of 2021 our total foreign debt was 120 billion US dollars.

Pakistan's external debt by the end of 1990 was \$ 20 billion (when Benazir Bhutto was removed from the premiership) and by the end of October 1999 (when Gen Pervez Musharraf took over the Government)the debt was 38 billion US dollars.

In 2007 (when Gen Pervez Musharraf resigned) the debt was still 38 billion US dollars.

In 2013, when PML (N) took over from PPP, the debt was 58 billion US dollars, which means the PPP had borrowed \$ 20 billion in five years.

The debt in 2017-18 was 93 billion US dollars, when PTI took over, which means PML (N) government had borrowed 35 billion US dollars as debt in five years.

And, in 2021 total foreign debt was 120 billion US dollars, which means the PTI government has taken 27 billion US dollars as debt in four years.

Hence, to pay back loans Pakistan requires 14 billion annually. Another reason which causes strain on Pakistan's economy is that our imports are more than exports, and to fulfil the trade deficit, Pakistan has to borrow from the State Bank or get foreign loans, which also add to the inflation.

Pakistan also faces annual budget deficits, as to provide services to its 22 billion population, it has to prepare heavy annual budgets, which are required for maintenance/recurring expenditure, to run the Government and its institutions, to meet the needs of the country's defence budget, for giving pays and pensions, and to cater for the development expenditure.

For annual budgets, the Government needs to muster sufficient funds through direct taxes, for which Pakistan's tax base is very narrow as out of its 22 crore population, only seven hundred thousand people are the tax filers/payers.

This situation causes a heavy deficit in the budget making, and hence to meet the budget deficits, the Government has to resort to indirect taxes, get additional domestic and foreign loans, which also increases the inflation and the value of the Pakistani Rupee is devalued.

Moreover, due to importing petrol and LNG at higher cost, prices of these commodities have to be increased in the country, which also becomes a cause for a rise in the prices of other commodities.

Also, this complex economic situation is being exploited by the black marketers and profiteers, who are increasing prices by hoarding the commodities as the Government has almost failed in pinpointing and punishing such people, thus further adding to the inflation.

In view of the above situation, to pay back foreign loans, avoid taking further loans, keeping the prices stable to help the poor and make Pakistan an economically self reliant and sovereign country, following immediate measures to be taken by the Government and the well to do Pakistani citizens, are suggested.

The Governments should focus on increasing agricultural/industrial production and expanding the IT sector for reducing the import of food items and enhancing exports to boost the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Also a large scale skills training of the Pakistani youth be organized by the Government to send well trained manpower abroad to substantially add to the remittances already being sent by the Pakistanis working abroad.

By doing so, Pakistan will gather sufficient forex reserves to pay for imports, repay foreign loans, stop taking further loans to return the loans, cater for the defence needs and keep the value of the Rupee stable and keep inflation under control.

The 33 percent Pakistani people, who are economically sound, should help Pakistan by voluntarily getting into Pakistan's tax net, as taxpayers.

If that is done then Pakistani governments will have a sufficient annual tax amount to make progressive, deficit-free and development oriented budgets, without getting foreign loans.

Also the governments will have funds in their hands to increase pays/pensions and daily wages and pay subsidies for the needy people, which will also help in controlling/fighting the inflation.

However, as a quick measure, joining Pakistan's tax net voluntarily by 33 percent economically sound Pakistani citizens is the key to resolving its immediate issues, for the progress of its economy and facilitating the life of about 40 percent poor people.

So, let us sacrifice a little by joining the country's tax net to make our country economically self-reliant and sovereign and help its poor to live comfortably.

—The writer is also a former Research Fellow of IPRI and Senior Research Fellow of SVI Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Economy and National Security By Dr

Moonis Ahmar

The 220 million people of Pakistan would have been prosperous and secure if the country's gross domestic product (GDP) had been \$6 trillion; exports \$800 billion per annum; foreign exchange reserves \$1 trillion and per capita income \$30,000. The economic vibrancy of Pakistan would have taken care of its human security predicament by ensuring 100% literacy and the availability of quality healthcare, public transport, housing, clean and safe drinking water. Alas, that is not the case; and despite decades of claims, Pakistan's economic predicament reflects the degeneration of its national security.

Presenting a national security policy focusing on geo-economic may be a good idea but the reality on the ground is different. Without hard work, efficiency, intelligence and integrity, no nation can transform its culture of corruption, nepotism, laziness and lack of accountability into one of merit, integrity and rule of law. It is the leadership that should be a role model and motivate people to turn around the economy, politics and governance. Parochial approach and tunnel vision tend to define national security from the prism of ideology, territorial integrity and conventional/nuclear arsenal but disregard bitter facts reflecting colossal poverty, illiteracy, failure of the state to provide clean and safe drinking water, quality education, healthcare, public transport and efficient and affordable justice system. Failure to eradicate extremism, radicalisation of youth, violence, intolerance, militancy and terrorism has exposed Pakistan's so-called paradigms of national security.

There is nothing new propagated by the protagonists of national security to focus on geo-economics because such type of superficial and rhetorical assertions were made earlier by those holding power. It is not only geo-economics that matters in determining priorities of national security, but the country's social fabric and societal contradictions which pose a grave challenge to human survival. The surge in crime and use of firearms by extremist groups prove how fragile the national security of the country is. The inability to take prompt and exemplary action against those who take the law into their hands is another failure of national security. Why has national security been superficially discussed by state actors? In the last 75 years, why has Pakistan failed to provide minimum security to an ordinary person?

How can a practical approach on matters of national security turn around things and transform the country from national security state to a human security state?

Nations cannot be built and established on a strong footing by shallow means. Something is clearly wrong with the national security of Pakistan because the literacy ratio of the country is 60%; 25 million children are out of school; cities and towns are inundated with beggars; per capita income is a mere \$1,500; GDP has come down to \$264 billion; exports are a meagre \$25 billion; foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank are just \$17 billion while the public debt has ballooned to Rs50 trillion. Pakistan cannot progress by just exporting vegetables, fruits and raw materials. One cannot expect any betterment when the country's national security is formulated by those who have nothing to do with the ground realities of the country and operate from their comfort zones. Currently, Pakistan needs to ensure a better future for its population of 220 million.

Three major requirements must be fulfilled in order to save Pakistan from a sustained decline.

First, focus and concentration on shaping policies and proper implementation for economic recovery, political stability, good governance, rule of law and justice system. Without clarifying how such objectives will be achieved, merely arguing that geo-economics will shape Pakistan's national security in the days to come does not make sense. Those who are a part of the VVIP culture and have nothing to do with the plight of the common person cannot transform Pakistan from a debt-ridden, economically and politically fragile state to a vibrant, secure and prosperous country.

Without proper work ethic, accountability, integrity and sense of responsibility, no policy for bettering the socio-economic and political conditions of the country can succeed. This would require the leadership to share sufferings with common people as was done by the leadership in Germany, Japan, China, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and the UAE. One cannot expect plausible results just through superficial ideas to turn around the economy. National security policy will remain in a vacuum and cannot render positive results when state-owned institutions such as PIA, Pakistan Steels and Pakistan Railways have accumulated debt worth trillions of rupees. Even PIA's Roosevelt Hotel in New York is closed with a debt of millions of dollars.

Second, the superficiality of national security policy is evident from the fact that those who are supposed to provide security to people, themselves need security. They cannot move without a heavily armed squad. This hypocrisy can be compared with the movement of heads of state and government of other countries where VVIP culture and heavy protocol are not seen. In Pakistan, however, even an ordinary person with some position or seat of power needs security and protocol. This is alarming because who will provide security to common people who are exposed to crimes, violence and terrorism when most of the security forces are deployed for those in positions of power.

When those who represent law enforcement and security agencies utilise their energies to target and spy on non-conformist individuals, groups and mainstream opposition parties instead of focusing on real security threats, one can only expect degeneration of society and state. Without reforming the mindset of those who wield power, national security policy would remain elusive. It is the feudal, tribal and VVIP culture which has ruined the economy, politics and security of Pakistan. Without changing their lifestyle, the elites of Pakistan cannot rebuild the country economically, politically, socially and in the realm of good governance, accountability, rule of law and justice system.

Third, there is no shortcut to having a functional and viable national security policy unless the country is in safe hands. Economic and security managers must be efficient, competent and honest with clarity and vision to pull the country from the vicious cycle of crises. Unless there is a serious crackdown on incompetence, corruption and nepotism, which is a major reason for augmenting the economic crisis, 220 million people of Pakistan will not feel secure. When they are hand to mouth and buried under the tsunami of poverty and price hike, the outcome is a compromise on the country's national security.

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CPEC Transforming the Development

Patterns of Pakistan By Muhammad Zamir

Assadi

China and Pakistan – two very immediate and close neighbors having the brotherly relationship of seven decades – have transformed the potential of unique partnership under the umbrella of splendid diplomacy.

In the journey of bilateral relationship spanning around the meaningful and productive benefits, both nations are marching ahead towards achieving the common agenda of peace, stability, development and prosperity.

The development of bilateral relationship between two nations always proved that Pakistan is China's cooperative and strategic partner and both sides have nurtured the relationship as exemplary in the world of diplomacy.

The leadership of both sides from day one of establishing relationship have stressed on the bright prospects of the bilateral cooperation and have gained for the public on both sides with mutual understanding and consultations.

With the passage of the time, the relationship bound and coated with trust between two sides have put a positive impact on various sectors for the development while Pakistan always stood at front for cultivating benefits for its people.

China, with its magnificent development in every sector always extended its experience towards Pakistan to provide investment for infrastructural upgradation including energy projects, vocational and agricultural development, building of Gwadar port, modern transportation projects including Orange Line Metro, educational, medical and cultural exchanges and other sectors.

As a flagship project of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has helped Pakistan break the energy and transport infrastructure bottlenecks, and injected strong impetus into its economic development.

Pakistan always ranked among the top countries that benefited from China's investment and rich experience of development that made Islamabad able to upgrade its various sectors.

CPEC by integrating the economies and connecting the technology of both sides has been strengthening the people-to-people contact at a rapid level that has emerged as the epitome of friendship.

China by generously sharing its resources with Pakistan under a bilateral cooperative working platform has been cultivating enormous benefits for the country by exploring the real potential in the pursuit of prosperity.

The magnanimous development under the 1st and 2nd phase of CPEC has been pushing forward the realization of national transformation that is also spreading the enthusiasm among people for the sustainable development.

The ongoing process of CPEC development at rapid scale is also facilitating the technological and industrial progress in the country that is also accelerating the national rejuvenation.

BRI, with its vast scope of cooperation introduced the new era of development under CPEC has also generated more 80 thousand job opportunities for the locals that has energized the labor market as well.

The CPEC by leading the development strategy has put the country into the new development era that strengthened the iron-clad friendship between the two countries with its recognition as a cornerstone of prosperity.

China's developmental plans led by Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have helped many countries including Pakistan to push forward the agenda of development respectively.

As per one of the reports, it is reported that 141 countries and 32 international organizations, including 19 UN agencies, have participated in the BRI. The worldwide recognition of BRI has also generated the message that the international community wishes to support the development agenda led by China being implemented with mutual consultation based on a win-win situation.

Amid the wave of unilateralism and protectionism by the US and western countries, China introduced the new development plan of BRI which attracted the countries in need of financial and technological assistance at large. The success of BRI and its international acceptance at a large scale is directly connected with its nature of elements including cooperation and meaningful consultation with its volume of trade, investment with member countries.

The global nature of BRI broadened the scope of bilateral cooperation under its umbrella that goes beyond infrastructure and trade as it has been strengthening cultural, educational and scientific exchanges as well very significantly. Since the start of BRI, this development plan has successfully become a central topic by generating the productive results for the member countries across the globe as it has introduced the new models of cooperation that does not attach any kind of strings to it. The acceptance of the international community for BRI belongs to its tremendous green development that has been meeting the criteria of United Nations green development strategy.

The commitment of China towards equality, peace and mutual benefits has been fostering the economic and cultural ties which is shaping the new patterns of development.

The smooth development of BRI in more than 141 countries has also rejected the so-called debt trap claims of western countries and attracted more countries to be a part of this development plan. The member countries of BRI also remained on top in receiving China's outbound direct investment expanded from 13.8 percent year on year to 7.43 billion U.S. dollars.

China's investment in BRI member countries into manufacturing and information transmission sectors have helped various nations to upgrade their technologies and cultivate maximum benefits. International community is expecting more and more financial and technological assistance from China as the development patterns of the 2nd largest economy of the world has become the buzzword.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Threatening Debt Crisis | Editorial

The debt crisis remains the biggest threat to stability in Pakistan, outweighing inflation, climate change and terrible cybersecurity, according to a new World Economic Forum (WEF) report. The Global Risks Report 2022 based its listing of the top five risks in 124 countries on survey responses from thousands of executives across the globe. Many of the global risks also apply to Pakistan — apart from the long-term dangers of climate change, natural and man-made environmental disasters, which were near-universal along with economic upheaval either due to debt or inflation, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, short-term risks include societal divides, livelihood crises and mental health deterioration. While unemployment and underemployment do get attention from Pakistani governments, societal divides usually only seem to get lip service attention every few months after incidents such as the lynchings in Sialkot or other extremist violence occur. Also, mental health remains a taboo subject, even among the medical community. These problems will worsen as the pandemic widens labour market imbalances, and erratic economic growth trends and education gaps increase the divide between the haves and have-nots.

The increased weight of these short-term pressures is bound to have a knock-on effect on policymaking to avert long-term threats, including involuntary migration forced by conflict, economic circumstances, and climate change. Pakistan is already seeing these occurring from abroad and inside the country. Incidentally, the report estimates that almost 5% of the global population is currently displaced by conflict.

Another international threat that has been magnified by remote work operations in the pale of Covid-19 is cybersecurity, with malware and ransomware attacks up by about 400%. Pakistan also saw major data breaches last year, like the FBR hack. Notably, there is little evidence to suggest that major system weaknesses have been addressed since then. Meanwhile, the fate of the world economy can be gauged by the fact that only 16% of respondents were optimistic about the future.

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Fate of the IMF Program | Editorial

Even after all the trouble the government has gone to accommodate IMF's demands-practically unravelling the ongoing fiscal's expansionary budget-there's still no telling when, or even if, the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) is going to be revived. The centre clearly thought it was more or less in the bag, and went ahead with blaming the previous administration for the present one's desperate need to get more loans to deflect all the criticism, but then the Fund made it mandatory to pass the so-called mini-budget and SBP amendment bill through parliament; failing which would mean no greenlight.

This is where, quite expectedly, a new Pandora's box has fresh problems have arisen. For one thing, the opposition isn't going to have any of it. After all, why would any opposition party willingly waste the opportunity to attack a sitting government, especially when it can claim to be moved by the people's suffering? A bigger red flag has come in the form of the coalition partners, raising some stiff questions. This considerably complicates the position of the treasury benches. MQM leaders reminded PTI, that too in the House, that being partners in government in no way meant that their role was be limited to voting in its favour whenever it so demanded; and also lamented that the contents of the mini-budget were not shared with them. They've objected to 11 clauses in the bill, including the imposition of taxes on food items, cottage industry, solar panels, hospital machinery, etc, and advised PTI to reconsider its position or prepare to face the "revenge of the masses." GDA, too, is worried about new taxes on agriculture input items, which could make food more expensive.

These are very serious issues and the government does not have the time to cajole both coalition partners and the opposition. It wouldn't be a smart idea to try and force these bills through the house either, as they did with electronic voting machines, because there's no assurance that allies will play along this time and also because opposition parties have threatened severe protests, in and out of parliament. Getting any more time from the Fund is also not very likely because even the short extension from mid-to end-Jan came with the hint that it might want an additional pound of flesh for the extra time.

At stake is a lot more than just \$1 billion. Failure to clear "prior actions" would kill the EFF, make loans from other bi- and multi-lateral donors more expensive, push

up yields of Pakistani bonds, and also risk losing the Saudi loan and oil facility. The government has its work cut out for it indeed because it has just a few more days to decide about the fate of the IMF program.

Source: Published in Daily Times

Significance And Challenges For Second Stage Of CPEC | By Iram Zahid

The second stage of CPEC emphasizes industrialization, agriculture, modernization, information technology, employment opportunities and socio-economic growth.

There are eleven Special Economic Zones under the CPEC project being established which will promote industrialization in Pakistan.

The first phase of Allama Iqbal Industrial City in Faisalabad, the first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Punjab under the CPEC project has been completed. Pakistan's economy has been adversely affected by the pandemic, but it didn't impact the CPEC projects which are moving ahead in a full swing.

The agriculture sector of the CPEC project has gained in importance since the second phase of the Free Trade Agreement in 2020, more Pakistani agricultural products have reached the Chinese market. From September 2021, Pakistani agricultural products have reached \$630 million which is a twofold increase over the previous time.

According to the Chinese embassy, CPEC has created 75,000 jobs in Pakistan since its start in 2013. The second phase of the CPEC project holds a promising panorama for a flourishing future.

CPEC is a game-changer in the region which will assist the state in dealing with unemployment, poverty, energy crisis, infrastructure, economic development and inequalities of undeveloped provinces.

The major initiatives of CPEC include construction of road networks, extending from Gwadar Port to Khunjerab Pass, up-gradation of ML-1, power projects of 10,000 megawatts and Gwadar-Nawabshah pipeline to transport gas from Iran.

CPEC is estimated to generate six to eight billion rupees per annum just in taxes and bridges toll as well as 2.3 million jobs are expected to be created between the years of 2015-2030, leading to more than 2.5 percent annual rise in GDP.

Currently, CPEC is almost completing its first phase and 32 Early Harvest Projects have been already completed.

A lot of substantial work has been done with a total investment of \$25 billion in the transportation and energy sectors as well as optical fiber projects. Ten projects related to the socio-development and infrastructure of Gwadar have been done which will make the Gwadar port operational for international transit trade.

The coastal city is being built under the Gwadar Master Plan to come up with the growing trade actions. Some wise strategies are also being articulated to assist maximum resources to local and foreign investors to generate a supporting atmosphere of business and trade.

On the other hand, there are some challenges while implementing the CPEC because it strengthens the economy and infrastructure of Pakistan.

The Balouch Sub-National perspective in which many political parties and Baloch separatist groups have some reservations regarding CPEC like authoritative behavior of the central government, the demographic instability of the Gwadar seaport, political imbalance, lack of education, removal of Baloch culture and identity in Pakistan and disempowerment of local inhabitants.

There are some political parties of the less developed province (KP) that have uncertainties regarding the CPEC project and claim that the federal government has shifted the original route of the corridor and will shift the economic development to Punjab only.

The western think tanks have labeled CPEC a “debt trap” for Pakistan that has embellished the public debt of the state. The growth of CPEC projects reveals that it is an advantageous project for Pakistan and regional states rather than a debt trap.

As quoted by Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Yao Jing, “Beijing would only proceed with projects that Pakistan wanted, this is Pakistan’s economy, this is their society”. By 2037-38, Pakistan must refund Chinese loans which is enough time and Pakistan could easily generate a bulk of money from the CPEC projects.

The first phase of CPEC faced a lot of serious challenges but the second phase has less turbulence as compared to the first.

To conclude, CPEC is the most significant project for China and Pakistan for progressive growth and secure supply for their products, goods, and services. The corridor would support Pakistan to counter Indian domination in the region.

Gwadar seaport would become the key transportation point connecting Eurasia with Southeast and Central Asia. Completion of CPEC would enhance the economic, trade, employment and business opportunities for the region.

The political parties should perform a positive role in the implementation of CPEC and they must play their essential role for joint benefits as well as to solve the problems concerning route controversy. Federal and provincial governments must provide a protective environment to all the workforce of China and other states.

Both governments should create a cooperative environment for better implementation of CPEC. All the facilities gained by CPEC must be given to all the provinces and the share of revenues should be divided into under-developed provinces. Better living standards must be ensured to the local employees at Gwadar seaport.

The establishment of maritime educational institutions must be built for locals to have a better understanding of maritime issues in the region. The government should be dedicated to the timely accomplishment of the CPEC project to strengthen the national economy and to reduce poverty issues.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Pakistan's Geo-Economic Challenge By Dr Qaisar Rashid

Stemming from geostrategic placement, geopolitics kept on dictating its terms to Pakistan, which has finally realized that it is lagging behind in development based on the economy. Pakistan remained infatuated with geo-politics, which it now intends to forsake.

Pakistan's cold war (1945-1991) engagement as a South Asian proxy to militate against the spread of communism bestowed upon Pakistan a limited role. From 1991 (the end of the Cold War) to 2001 (the beginning of the War on Terror), life remained quiescent as Pakistan got the provision of oil supplied either free or at subsidized rates from Saudi Arabia, especially whenever economic sanctions were slapped on Pakistan. Further, certain other Middle Eastern countries also extended to Pakistan's financial bailout packages.

It was the Kargil war of 1999 that dented Pakistan's image internationally, as the world got wary of a nuclear-capable country telling lies to them about the war it had launched. The War on Terror of 2001 worsened the impression further. Where things went wrong was the point where the United States alleged that Pakistan was double-dealing and that Pakistan was shy of delivering on the promises. Encompassing the past, the US was seeing its relations with Pakistan as a whole, whereas Pakistan was seeing its relations with the US as bound by time (post-9/11) or perhaps by investment (dole out dollars to serve the purpose). Eventually, on 1 January 2018, in his first tweet of the year, US President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of lying and deceiving the US while receiving billions of dollars in foreign aid, even though being a US ally Pakistan had been enjoying a special status as a non-NATO alliance partner. The US alleged that Pakistan was not cracking down effectively on terror groups, active in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Subsequently, the US withdrew financial (civil and military) support and left Pakistan in the lurch. The Trump administration also campaigned to add Pakistan to an intergovernmental watch list for terrorism financing. With that, the facility of Pakistan's geostrategic position giving birth to its geopolitical utility was over. Further, the age of diplomacy sans economic maintenance was also over.

Gul was considered a reflection of Pakistan's security mindset, which remained preoccupied with the country's geostrategic position.

The post-2018 realities forced Pakistan into transforming itself and seeking refuge in geo-economics. That is, Pakistan had to utilize its geo-strategic position to espouse geo-economics. Pakistan's choice to shift its direction has been excruciating since Pakistan has not been in a habit of thinking in geo-economics except that Pakistan permitted China to have a road link to Gwadar as a trade route in 2013. The consequent China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) remained the main realization of Pakistan's preference for geo-economics.

It had been surprising for many Pakistanis to see President Xi Jinping visit India in 2014 and pledge to invest the US \$20 billion in the next five years, besides agreeing to provide greater market access to Indian products to reduce the large trade gap with India. The post-2014 era opened a new vista in China-India bilateral trade relations. Until 2014, the net Chinese investment in India was the US \$1.6 billion and this was mostly by the state-owned enterprises. After 2014, however, as per the Ministry of Commerce in Beijing, a noticeable shift from state-driven to market-driven private sector investment from China has taken place. The total Chinese investment in India is expected to cross US \$26 billion. Further, as per the latest data issued by the Chinese customs, China-India bilateral trade, which was \$87.6 billion in 2020 rose to US \$125.66 billion in 2021. It was around a 43 per cent increase in trade in one year, despite the China-India border standoff called the Doklam standoff in 2017 and the China-India border clashes near the disputed Pangong Lake and in the Galwan River valley in Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control since May 2020. Most Pakistanis are not coming to terms with this duality: trading on the one hand and fighting on the other.

Before his death in August 2015, the late General Hamid Gul kept on peddling the idea of nuclear brinkmanship, whether Pakistan was dealing with India or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). If he were alive today, he would have seen the futility of his prescription. In fact, he misled Pakistanis through his emotional and naive rhetoric buoyed up by a few anchors in the electronic media. Airing the threat of nuclear escalation, Pakistan cannot blackmail the world to agree to its terms. Gul was considered a reflection of Pakistan's security mindset, which remained preoccupied with the country's geostrategic position to be translated quintessentially in terms of geopolitics. The strategy saw Pakistan scale down on the map of development. The economic constraints that Pakistan has been

hobbled with have made the nuclear possession vulnerable. This is one of the reasons Pakistan has started thinking loud in terms of geo-economics.

To the world, Pakistan's economic vulnerability is obvious: Pakistan tends to spend more and earn less every year. Pakistan's habit to oversize its budget has refused to wean off although the foreign aid facility, which was the hallmark of the Cold War, is no more available. The bailout package of the IMF is meant for earning from Pakistan the original borrowed amount with interest. Of its own volition, the incumbent government has fallen into the trap of the interest-based international system, as Pakistan preferred not to cut off its expenditure and reduce imports of luxury items after 2018. Now, Pakistan is fast approaching the tipping point where it has to distinguish between developmental expenditures and non-developmental expenditures, and similarly between essential import items and luxury import items. The incumbent government is lucky that its predecessor government laid the infrastructure, which is sustaining the economy. The infrastructure development projects are still buttressing the economy through their both direct and indirect productive impacts.

Presently, barring the CPEC, Pakistan has no significant experience to meet the challenges of transformation into geo-economics. The path to the geo-economy is un-treaded and hence treacherous for Pakistan.

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Source: Published in Daily Times

EDUCATION

Quantity Assurance in Higher Education By **Muneer Ahmed Mirjat**

IMPORTANCE of Quality Higher Education in the country is being debated these days on various fora.

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.

The new knowledge in various domains is the catalyst for the economy especially during the 21st Century because our decision-making is more relying on data, information and knowledge produced by the higher education institutions (HEIs).

It helps in finding a solution to the current problems being faced by individuals, organizations and society. The people in Medical, Engineering, Computing and other Social Sciences are focusing on Data Sciences and use of Artificial Intelligence to support decision making at all levels.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established in 2002 to improve access to the higher education, develop quality culture in academics and research domains and focus on relevance of all educational activities to the national goals.

All this is to be achieved through formulating policies, guidelines and criteria for HEIs on a regular basis along with strong implementation mechanism which should be in line with the letter and in spirit of these policies.

To achieve these goals, the Commission had laid down various criteria like Faculty Appointment Criteria wherein the major focus was on acquiring the highest qualification i.e. Ph.D. in the particular field and a certain number of publications along with the number of years as experience.

The critics these days are objecting to the number of publications versus their real impact on the society.

The matter is debatable, but as far as research culture is concerned, it was limited to a few HEIs and organizations.

Initially, there was no such requirement in place, the purpose was to compel stakeholders for focusing on creativity, problem solving approach and knowledge generation.

The requirement of number in the criteria was introduced to measure the performance of the faculty members in a uniform manner.

Further, the universities are expected to align these standards with their local demand in terms of relevance when applications of candidates against teaching positions are scrutinized.

The Government Ministries, Departments and various donor organizations including World Bank, Asian Development Bank, etc require information about the sector in numbers like how many numbers PhDs are there in Sciences and Social Sciences? How many publications are produced by each university? Keeping these demands in view, the whole system was created to reflect progress on a quantity basis for transparency and uniformity.

The relevance which is a basic ingredient for assessing impact was left for the Universities to decide and implement.

For example, if a university is interested to hire the services of an individual for the post of Professor, the HEC minimum requirements are PhD. Qualification in the relevant discipline, 15 years of teaching or work experience in universities or research & development (R&D) organization(s) and 15-number of publications in a relevant discipline.

It is expected that the relevance of the subject or discipline can be better determined through Scrutiny Committee which comprises subject experts.

These were the minimum guidelines and the same can be made stringent by the universities but, unfortunately, some institutions have tried to favour a few individuals by relying on these minimum requirements for the appointment of professors.

Resultantly, the peer universities have followed same practices and just focused on the number of publications or years of experience only. Actually, they were supposed to assess the relevance factor for both ie publications and experience.

Further, for promoting research culture in the universities, HEC provided funds to local research journals for developing platform at par with international standards like the impact factor (web of science) for the visibility of research at international and national level.

The impact Factor is again based on numbers ie number of citations made in two years divided by the number of publications made during the same period.

These are the acceptable measuring mechanisms world over and are devised for uniform assessment of research quality. There may be other ways to assess the quality of the research as well.

The HEC has developed standards for evaluation of institutional performance which are again being assessed on the basis of numbers.

The International University Rankings, which are widely accepted in all countries are mostly dependent on numbers i.e. Number of Foreign Students, Number of Ph.D. Programs, No of Research Grants, etc.

The universities which meet or exceed these standards are ranked accordingly at the international, national and subject level.

The efforts of HEC were acknowledged in the report titled “Pakistan: Another BRIC in the Wall” by Thomson Reuters in 2016. The report was based on the performance of HEIs in terms of publications made during 2005-2015.

The report mentioned that Pakistan has emerged as the country with the highest percentage of highly cited papers in comparison with the BRIC countries ie Brazil, Russia, India and China.

All that was possible due to the quantity of the papers. The quality and quantity both are linked with each other and cannot be separated.

To achieve quality, one must develop standards that can be measured in numbers and the same can be further interpreted from a quality or impact perspective. In this regard, not only HEC as well as all other stakeholders including HEIs must positively play their role.

It is the right time to focus more on aligning our research preferences with energy crisis, urban transportation, food security and other such strategic domains.

—The writer is Deputy Director at Higher Education Commission, Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Covid Exposed Many Educational Shortcomings By Rozina Asif

COVID 19, like all other industries, has affected the education sector in various ways. Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and enthusiastic and able to learn, could find their way past closed school doors to alternative learning prospects. Those from impoverished backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down.

This crisis has exposed the many shortages and inequities in our education systems – from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education and the supportive environments to focus on learning up to the misalignment between resources and needs.

This was the situation all over the globe. However, it was most crucial for the custodians of the education sector to make more informed and planned decisions while deciding about the future of the students.

Excess to the online system, network and gadgets, and trained resources were the most significant challenges.

These challenges were increased when delayed decisions were made related to the conduction of exams of SSC and HSSC. Syllabus coverage and mode of the exam with online teaching and onsite papers were a topic of discussion for many days after Government has decided to conduct exams.

Students' behavior, on the other hand, was also the big question mark on our education system. The result is out and has again raised a severe reservation on the checking and evaluation criteria.

In nine boards of Punjab alone, the A+ result was 60%; however, the admission capacity in universities is 58%.

Now the question is, where would those A, B, and C grades go and find their future? What Government has planned for their future and dreams? One ill-informed decision has messed up with the future of our students so badly.

Those who got good marks are even shocked, so what guarantees that those who were passed with good grades are truly capable of gaining admission to universities? The burden is shifted to universities to conduct admission tests and further filter the number.

I do not know about others, but being an educationalist, I am scared about the future of our next generation. Those who will not end up in any university will end up in depression. Their time, money, energy, and passion have been wasted. We are producing demotivated youth who are full of doubt about their future. They will lack trust in their abilities and hard work.

School closure due to covid has created many psychological, adjustment, and discipline problems other than curriculum coverage. Youth not engaged in studies and other constructive fields will never be able to contribute to the economic, social, and emotional development of a society.

All this will result in Depression. A society where the youth is facing depression due to a lack of seats in universities will produce an unhealthy and depressed mindset.

Remember, we are not talking about low performers; we are talking about students who have scored A, B, and C grades. They will lose faith in their efforts.

Many families in a country like ours invest in their child education by cutting on many other essential needs with the hope that their children, after getting an education, will bring change in their life overall. Depression due to all this may result in an increased rate of Suicide.

Child Labor will also increase when the parent cannot afford one more year to invest in the child's education. Many families are badly affected by Covid; they can't get admission to the university and wait for one more year.

Out of fear of lacking behind and becoming a burden on their families, many children themselves look for a source of income to inject money to support families.

Early marriages may also emerge as one of the outcomes of such decisions and results, especially in many backward areas where girls who are still struggling to fight for their fundamental rights may not be able to raise their voice after they do

not get admission to universities. There is a dire need to think critically before making any such decisions.

More universities, evening shifts in colleges/ universities, more programs to develop essential skills, and basic learning must be introduced to save our next generation from such disasters.

—The writer is an educationist, based in Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pakobserver

Nordic Model of Education and Pakistan By

HR Ahmad/Kulsoom Ghias

Children are born and the world is already there for them to find the essence of life. Through the stages of development starting from early infancy and early childhood, every child carries the creative energy within to explore and seek the essence of life. An enabling environment of care, nutrition and stimulation of playfulness is required to unfold their creative genomic programs referred to as “nature”. This in turn depends on how the cognitive neural circuitry is nurtured. The ideal soil for the children’s growth is difficult to find but not impossible. Worth-citing here is the Nordic model that has high economic productivity. It is also associated with high social equality, trust and wellbeing. The model shows that children’s performance is independent of parents’ income. The nurturing of a civil society is driven by an opportunity afforded to all children of a country to enter elementary schools without discrimination of social class or standing. This can serve as seedlings of a nation-state with nourishment provided by a universal pedagogical curriculum (UPC).

David Brooks in his article in NYT in 2020 described how the Nordic nations in the 19th century were homogenous and poor. Interestingly, their economic growth took off after 1870. This is before establishment of the welfare state. How did they achieve it? The 19th century Nordic elites realised that if their countries were to prosper, they must shed the curse of illiteracy by creating a genuine ‘public school system’ for all children to learn and grow as a natural fabric of society. They laid the foundation of a holistic education known as Bildung in German. It means moral, emotional, intellectual and civic transformation of a person to unfold their talents and passion to be enlightened. Bildung enables a holistic broad-based education with the capacity of critical thinking. The training deals with acquiring expertise in a general and/or specialised field. The holistic education enables students to observe their world around them to understand the complex functional dynamics between self and society. How lucidly Rachel Andersen and Tomas Bjorkman describe the narratives in *The Nordic Secret*, “Bildung is the way that the individual matures and takes upon herself/himself ever bigger personal responsibility towards family, friends, fellow citizens, society, our globe, and the global heritage of our species, while enjoying ever bigger personal, moral and existential freedoms,” Before 19th century, most Europeans identified themselves in local but

not in national terms. However, the Nordic Curriculum instilled in students a learning mechanism to switch from local to national to universal terms of reference. This would enable students to take shared responsibility for the whole stepping up from the family to a society to a nation. The Nordic educators enabled students to develop internal awareness dealing with emotions, cravings, wounds, and desires, and learn how to become resilient to deal with crisis.

The creative role of curriculum in a child's development starts from parental conforming to group norms. If the environment enables, the child may finally frame her/his own norms of value. With this background, growing children learn as a pacemaker in a network of selves to acquire mutuality and holistic thinking. Thus, the purpose of a holistic education is to nurture children exploring the new world by providing them a horizontal enabling environment to unfold the creative energies.

The challenges for such a model to be implemented in a developing country like Pakistan include a well-established territorial society, agricultural means of production, children's performance dependent on parent's income, the influence of race, gender, language, culture complex and a higher rate of brain and capital drains. What it will take for the elites of this country to come to a consensus to shed the curse of illiteracy by implementing a UPC on the lines of Nordic model is indeed a challenge. A UPC would enable all children to live and grow with dignity and integrity as proud citizens of Pakistan. It could then lead to an integrated higher education system of bachelor studies of philosophy being sandwiched by natural and social sciences. It means the best revolution could be through adopting new means of universal education and training for all children without any discrimination of class and gender as vital sources of human development leading to a country's progress and wellbeing.

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Uniformity of Education in Pakistan By

Muhammad Anwar Farooq

Socrates said that education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel. Education is the process to facilitate learning to acquire knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, habits and personal development. Commonly the methods used to educate people are teaching, training, storytelling, discussion, demonstration and direct research. The role of education in nation-building is unquestionable and it is a valuable investment in the development of human capital. Historically, education always contributes to the economic, social and moral development of any nation and it is a premier right of every person in society. No doubt, Pakistan is one of the growing nation-states. In such a scenario, creativity, integration of knowledge, research and analytical approach of thinking becomes important. So, it is the need of time to equip students with analytical & critical thinking skills and to familiarize them with the technology and modern methodologies in perspective of national development. In the modern system of education, the curriculum has core importance. It is basically a candid and planned sequence of instructions that determines the goals, methods, materials and assessment techniques. A good curriculum creates and reflects culture & identity in a pellucid way. It helps educators to develop a compatibility with modern trends, innovative technology and enable them to impart required skills to the students. Consistent teaching and learning are not possible without a proper curriculum. It helps teachers to set measurable goals of learning for their students.

In Pakistan, there is a wide gulf among different social classes due to the difference in Urdu and English-medium schooling. Now, English is not just a language to learn knowledge but many people consider it a status symbol. It is necessary to bring the nation out of such complexes because no nation could rise until it relied on its original values and morals. For this purpose, the government of Pakistan has designed a national curriculum framework, under which the 'Single National Curriculum' would be developed and implemented in three phases. It was claimed that the national curriculum framework is multidimensional and it would address the existing issues related to ideological, academic, socio-cultural, emerging trends and evaluation paradigms. It is considered as one system of education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment which will ensure fair and equal opportunity to receive a high-quality

education for all students, social cohesion and national integration, alleviation of disparities in education content across the multiple streams, equal opportunities for upward social mobility, equity in education, holistic development of children in the light of emerging international trends & local aspirations and smooth inter-provincial mobility of teachers & students. In the curriculum development, the special emphasis had been laid on the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as an inspiration of ethics and morality. The minorities would also be taught about their religions. The national curriculum framework is designed with an aim to achieve national goals of education, to formulate a candid national education policy, to design an effective curriculum, to candidly define learning outcomes, to increase the flexibility to cope with the local or regional needs within the broader perspective of national policies & needs and to provide an instrument for accountability in education. The national curriculum framework will also address the issues like school modals, learning environment in schools, medium of instructions and teaching languages, teacher training, assessment & examination, feedback mechanisms, Information sharing and harmonization, etc. No doubt, the national curriculum framework is an outstanding step to revolutionize the educational horizon in the country.

On the other hand, it is a historical fact that in Pakistan it is easy to formulate such frameworks & policies but the most difficult step is the implementation. During the implementation phase, one has to face many ground realities that hurdle the change.

On the other hand, it is a historical fact that in Pakistan it is easy to formulate such frameworks & policies but the most difficult step is the implementation. During the implementation phase, one has to face many ground realities that hurdle the change. For the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework, it is necessary to upgrade the infrastructure and facilities in all government schools. Such developments in schools would require huge funds which are difficult to manage in the prevailing economic situations of the country. On the other hand, private schools are also bound to follow the single national curriculum but those schools are free to teach any additional material or even additional subjects. It is also allowed that private schools can use any book that is consistent with the curriculum. It is a fact that the infrastructure and educational facilities in private schools are much better than the government schools. The ability to avail the modern educational resources is incomparable between the students of government and private schools. The question is that how the objectives of

'National Curriculum Framework' and 'Single National Curriculum' could be achieved with all these differences? How it is possible to bring uniformity in the paradigm of education with all the above-described differences? No doubt, for developing countries like Pakistan, it is the need of time to design and implement a uniform education policy for all. It would help to bridge the class differences as well as would provide the capable workforce to run the state affairs.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Can OIC and Taliban Deliver? By Durdana Najam

Foreign ministers of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Corporation (OIC) got together in Islamabad last week to work out a plan of action to avert the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Not a single Islamic country had thus far recognised Afghanistan, and it was expected that this moot might get the ball rolling in that direction. 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.

OIC is the second-largest organisation after the United Nations, with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents. The organisation has been instrumental in many ways, like in alleviating hunger and raising the bar of equality for Muslims in its member states as well as countries that had joined it as observers. However, the organisation's inability to intervene effectively in solving the issue of Palestine, Kashmir and Afghanistan has rendered it perceptually a non-effective organisation. When India revoked the autonomous status of Kashmir in August 2019, there was complete silence in the Arab world.

Other than Turkey, the Islamic world preferred to remain isolated from India's decision. Pakistan goaded OIC into convening an extraordinary session to condemn India's unilateral decision to annex Kashmir, a disputed land between India and Pakistan. Nothing happened, however. Condemnation did follow, but it had lost teeth because Saudi Arabia, the architect of the OIC, had given a red carpet welcome to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his arrival in the Kingdom shortly after the annexation. The United Arab Emirates followed suit in honouring India as its leading partner in business. To date, Pakistan is practically

the lone voice highlighting India's atrocities on the Muslims of occupied Kashmir. In his keynote address at the OIC meeting in Islamabad, Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, tried to stir the conscience of the Muslim countries by talking about Kashmir. Did it register with the participating countries is a million-dollar question and the one that may never be answered.

Palestine is another issue that could never find an audience in the OIC. Not that it remained silent whenever Israel threw missiles on the unarmed and innocent people and children of Gaza, but the organisation's effort could not go beyond criticism.

Similarly, despite being a platform of the world's wealthiest countries, the OIC had to take up the cause of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims to the United Nations General Assembly.

Unity among the Muslim countries is the most desirous thing today, but most of these countries are pitted against each other for one reason or another. If not directly involved in the conflict, some countries intervene through proxies in others' affairs. This is what happened persistently in Afghanistan, this is what happened in Syria, and this happened when a no-fly zone was imposed over Libya in connivance with the western countries.

It is a good omen that the OIC has taken the lead in lending assistance to Afghanistan, and so far, the US has also agreed to relax sanctions to allow the release of funds.

The OIC member states have urged the Taliban to abide by "obligations under international human rights covenants, especially with regards to the rights of women, children, youth, elderly and people with special needs". A team of religious scholars under the OIC banner would travel to Afghanistan to engage the Taliban on issues "such as, but not limited to, tolerance and moderation in Islam, equal access to education and women's rights in Islam". Though the Taliban have promised to give women rights equal to their male counterparts and build a governance structure that does not interfere with the internationally acceptable standards, there has been little effort to keep the commitment.

The mandate of the meeting to create a convergence among the member countries to build an internationally acceptable governance model will be unsustainable if

efforts are not extended to address the mindset that is keeping the Taliban from becoming a normal state in the comity of the nations. Their mindset that Islamic and western values clash with one another needs to be revisited. The West has done its part; it is now for the Islamic world to unlearn the theories that have brought Muslims in the cross hairs of imperial powers.

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Theory, practice of international relations **and trends in 2021 By Inam Ul Haque**

International Relations (IR) has seen some tumultuous period thanks to one cataclysmic event after another in the last 100 years or so. From the World Wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) onwards, major IR milestones can be identified as formation of the United Nations in 1945, Korean War (1950-1953), Suez Crisis (1956), Arab-Israel Wars (1947, 1967, 1973), creation of Bangladesh (1971), Iranian Revolution (1978...), Soviet Afghan War (1979-1989), Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), Cold war 1.0 and the breakup of Soviet Union (1989-1991), First Gulf War (1991), US/NATO-Afghan War (2001-2021), and the 2nd Gulf War (2003-2011), etc.

However, the above human-engineered incidents are also buttressed by events like climate change, global warming, calamities and pandemics... Covid-19 (2020...) being the latest. IT revolutions and the advent of microchip in mid-20th Century (1956) impacted greatly on human life and human/inter-state relations.

IR is considered a combination of foreign policy and diplomacy. In narrow sense, IR stipulates interaction between/among nation states, whereas, its broader manifestation is the 'totality of interactions between, below or above nation states including communities, peoples and organisations, etc. Foreign policy, on the other hand, is 'a systematic statement of deliberately selected national interests'. Whereas, diplomacy is considered a tool of foreign policy.

It is good to know that Pakistan's first National Security Policy is in the offing, after some 70 years with multiple drafts repeatedly shelved in the past. This would be a big triumph for the National Security Division and all related entities (34) besides Joint Staff HQ, Services HQs and academia/NDU. The document is expected to firmly state national purpose, national objectives and national interests (vital, primary, secondary, permanent, variable, general and peripheral) etc. A yearly review is prescribed to harness changes in the global, regional and domestic environment.

IR stuck to its traditional view up to the end of First WW, when it was focused upon historical description of events. After WW-I, the focus shifted to current affairs.

After the Second WW, IR analysis spanned scientific understanding of the causes of conflict. Its current and modernist view is broad in meaning, scope and extents; is multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional; and spans multiplicity of actors i.e. states, people, societies and institutions. IR today deals with diverse issues impacting upon national interest, power politics, international institutions, global politics/trade and commerce, international/corporate law and multinational organisations, etc.

In a broad survey of approaches and theories to the IR, 'Positivist' Theory, involves liberalism, realism and humanist approaches (putting a premium on centrality of human values/human rights), while taking a linear view of history. The 'Post-Positivist' Theory deals with international society and social constructivism. It opposes the notion of 'power' being 'just there'. The theory gives weightage to the broad human construct (beliefs/cultural practices), institutions and collective identities. The 'Post-Structuralist' Theory deals with issues like feminism, post-colonialism, etc. It tries to redefine power as a construct.

However, we are at the cusp of a new context in the IR. Just a little before the Covid-19, the world under the bonhomie of WTO and EU was jubilant in economic and political integration and globalisation. The competing strands of ethnicity, technology, finance, media and ideas were all working towards this cherished integration. Regionalism and localism were effectively contained; at least that was the perception. Not anymore. Today non-traditional issues (health, migration and emigration, trade and commerce, climate change, sustainable development, inequality, intellectual property) dominate the agenda. And the advent of non-state actors has changed the nature of power (military, economic and smart).

Diplomacy, the art of negotiation, and an effective and tested IR tool is also under transformation on two accounts. First, its nimbleness and softer side is changing into a hardwired format. It is giving in to sanctions, unilateral/imposed/agenda wars and other coercive measures, mostly targeting the already weak and the poor. Non-recognition of the present Afghan government by even the stalwarts of Muslim Ummah, without the US/Western blessing, is a case in point. Diplomatic tools like tact, skillful persuasion, adjustment, allegiances, alliances and agreements, etc are backseat. Diplomatic protocol and etiquette, diplomatic correspondence, messaging and media skills, and diplomatic language, etc are at times, a brazen casualty. The changing face of diplomacy now transforms from 'secrecy to nakedness/brazenness'.

Second, diplomats are under pressure for quality and acumen. As against the 'traditional view' of 'state-centred approach' in diplomacy, that related to government-to-government relations (primarily in the realm of geo-strategy and security), dealing with limited actors; war and peace; balance of power, territorial disputes, and alliances, etc; the 'modernist view' of diplomacy integrates a plethora of subjects. Its seemingly unlimited canvas encompasses from democracy to human rights, culture to agriculture, climate change to economic development, biotechnology to cooperative networks, private sector to civil society, etc.

Its newer frontiers are now economic diplomacy, digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy (China, Russia), diaspora diplomacy, etc. Use of 'nakedness' through 'disruptive technologies and informatics' during negotiations is generally another tough ask. No wonder, our foreign office needs to do a lot of catching up and do it fast and do it regularly.

From the above theoretical framework, what can we forecast? Last year, US Council of Foreign Relations identified growing costs for pandemic preparedness by national governments; increased cost because of/and to fight climate change; dependence of future medical trade upon a functional and dependable global supply chain; and growing gap between a younger population and aging leaders in Africa, as some trends to watch in 2021. The list remained inconclusive.

Year 2022 is likely to see continuation of cold hostility between the US and China for global leadership. Block politics would see relative consolidation, given the exponential expense by China through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in mostly poor countries. New variants of Coronavirus would keep rattling the US and Europe in particular, continuing shifting of trade and commerce towards East/South. Covid-related restrictions would cause unrest among vast segments of global population. Dissatisfaction with national leaders (perceived as under-performers) would grow. International air travel/tourism would shift domestically. Worldwide economic recovery would remain erratic. Global hotspots like Afghanistan, Middle East, South Asia, South China Sea, Ukraine, Africa, etc would remain hostage to a single-event trigger. Big data control, manipulation and privacy concerns would keep technology giants like Amazon, Facebook, etc under pressure.

However, believing that His rehmat (blessings) eclipses His zehmat (annoyance), let us wish all a happy New Year.

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Covid-19 and Global Politics By Rashid A Mughal

COVID has impacted on our lives, domestic and global economy, national and international politics, to an extent to which no one ever predicted.

In her opinion, Katherine Barbieri, an Associate Professor and Vice Chair of the Political Science Department in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina whose expertise is in the area of international relations and international political economy made that assessment recently.

Though her focus is mainly on US politics but she has also spoken about the global politics.

Early in February 2020, there was widespread and robust concern around the globe that an excessive reaction to the COVID-19 threat, whose impact was unclear, would lead to a severe slowdown of the global economy.

Former President, Donald Trump presumably shared this concern to the point of being accused of having ignored the epidemic. Now, COVID-19 has wiped out every other news story.

The internal politics of the United States, trade between the United States and China, tensions between Iran and the United States, Brexit, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, not to mention North Korean nuclear proliferation — all have disappeared from the screens.

Initially, the fringe voices of the political right were particularly alarmed by COVID-19, while established liberals and their media allies were playing down the threat out of fear of giving aid and comfort to Sino-phobia or populism.

In March 2020 the dynamics shifted. With the spread of the disease, Democrats abandoned their anti-quarantine stance in favour of reasonable panic, while conservatives split into two distinct camps. Some dusted off the classic themes of a conservatism that draws strength from external dangers, while others embraced a conservatism that we can define as a clannish denial.

Lately, in the crisis, most conservatives and liberals have united in alarm at least over the disease and its impact on public health and the economy.

When it comes to government, COVID-19 is not what has most blurred the lines that separated free market and minimalist government advocates from supporters of big government. The Trump Presidency did not lend itself to this traditional dichotomy.

Trump was fiercely anti-socialist in his rhetoric. Still, his policies were about the government steering business to nationalist objectives and defending labour and its rights to jobs, while also pushing government planning and investment in large infrastructure projects.

His vision of “making America great again” required massive government intervention in the economy and increases in the federal budget deficit. This incoherence was so prominent that it pushed some observers to describe the Trump administration’s policy as “big-government anti-socialism.”

While USA political environment still clings to the two-party system, it recognizes that parties themselves no longer adequately represent the ideals that people associate with them.

The Republican President and the Democratic Party’s candidate, Bernie Sanders, were viewed by their respective party machines as outsiders, and with good reasons. But that is what many Americans want, someone who is nothing like the politicians that got Americans to this place.

If we talk about the role of the government in the economy, a minimalist versus interventionist state, the provision of social services versus free marketers, we see that political economy has morphed more than the virus.

While it is difficult to make predictions in times of uncertainty, it appears that there are already widespread calls for expanded government.

And we are likely to see more expansion in the face of health crisis which have turned into a full-blown economic crisis.

However, it seems that COVID-19 arrived relatively late to change the outcome of the presidential election. General election outcome was the product of a clash of personalities rather than clash of political agendas.

Furthermore, it was also due to the general perception of the people who were unhappy with the government intervention driven by COVID-19 into the country's economic and social life.

Could the effects of the pandemic bring larger changes to the national political conversation regarding health-care coverage for all, a better safety net for gig workers, etc is the question, many Americans are worried about.

How profoundly COVID-19 will modify the national debate regarding health care will depend substantially on how successfully we manage today's crisis and, eventually, on the failure of efforts to find quick solutions.

At least for the moment, Biden seems to underline the exceptional nature of the crisis and, therefore, the extraordinary nature of the tools necessary to resolve it.

How much COVID-19 is not perceived as something worthy of a radical rethinking of the entire health system, remains to be seen.

There are concerns that authoritarian governments around the world have used the pandemic as cover for instituting tighter control over news media and civil liberties.

Certainly, this isn't the first time such governments have used crises to tighten their grip on power. Each historical experience has such unique characteristics and dimensions that the saying that history is lived first as a tragedy and then as a farce is probably true.

Today's circumstances are both qualitatively and quantitatively different from similar past crises. As a consequence, comparisons may be deceptive. Present authoritarian regimes cannot be compared with the totalitarian regimes of the last century.

However, it is undoubtedly true that COVID-19 is favouring undemocratic trends, at least within countries traditionally accustomed to this type of evolution, but it is still early to express a definitive judgment.

From this point of view, the most interesting case is undoubtedly constituted by Hungary, which, unlike countries such as Brazil and Turkey, is also subject to limitations to its sovereignty associated with its membership in the European Union.

On the pretext of COVID-19, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán took full power and effectively suspended all prerogatives of the legislative branch.

Among the various initiatives immediately promoted, there was a rule, aimed at punishing the spread of false news, apparently in stark contrast to any definition of freedom of expression.

The turning point opened a heated debate on the future of Hungary itself and of its position within the European Union and, more particularly, on the opportunity to expel Orbán's party from the European People's Party.

There is no question that politicians, media pundits and many others have seized on the opportunity to exploit the pandemic for political gain.

There is enough blame to go around, and it is disheartening to see that partisanship has coloured our ability to pursue objective analysis, even among academics. If we think back to late January 2020, when the Chinese army was surrounding the city of Wuhan, the US media and most of the country was fixated on lectures on the impeachment process.

Ironically, the debates about health-care that the Democrats were proud to elevate to centre stage ignored any discussion of preparations for a pandemic. American media provides no escape, even possible solutions to certain death (in the form of experimental drugs) become entangled in partisanship.

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

Source: Published in Pak Observer

A Troubled World in 2022 By Maleeha Lodhi

THE start of the new year is when one looks ahead to identify key global trends and risks in the coming year and consider whether any geopolitical shifts can be expected. What are the newer challenges that may emerge and longer standing ones that will be reinforced? Many think tanks across the world undertake such assessments as do leading international publications and investment firms.

The coronavirus pandemic that overwhelmed the world over the past two years will continue to pose a challenge in 2022. The pandemic's new phase triggered in late 2021 by the Omicron variant dampened hopes that the virus would be defeated by vaccination drives. By the start of the year the world braced itself for another surge and emergence of vaccine resistant variants. Europe and the US struggled with a 'tsunami of cases' as fears grew that the new wave would also engulf Asia.

2022 will see countries deal with the multifaceted, disruptive fallout of Covid, and above all, its economic consequences especially stagflation as growth slows and inflation rises across the world. Global supply chain disruptions are expected to continue pushing up prices. Most assessments see inflation as a key global trend in 2022, which will jeopardise economic recovery.

The geopolitics of vaccines will continue as will vaccine diplomacy and the grim reality of unequal access to vaccination by rich and developing countries. The lesson of the past year has gone largely unlearned — that no one is protected unless everyone is protected. Yet vaccine disparities persist, urging the WHO chief to again call for an end to "global vaccine inequity". Tom Standage, editor of the Economist's 'World Ahead in 2022' publication, optimistically counts among the top 10 trends the transition of the pandemic to an endemic as a result of anti-viral pills, upgraded vaccines and antibody treatments. But he concludes tellingly that the virus will remain deadly in the developing world while rich countries will extricate themselves from Covid.

Trends point to an unsettled world with global solidarity and leadership in short supply.

The lack of global solidarity witnessed during the pandemic is another trend likely to persist in many areas this year. Despite assertions by the world's big powers to

strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation, the reality has been different with competition rather than collaboration being the dominant dynamic. Countries' preoccupation with domestic problems will also weaken global cooperation. The annual Strategic Survey by the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies identifies "the cooperation gap in various key areas" as a top trend which is already evident. But it also cites some "cooperation successes" including the new START treaty and COP26 (on climate change). The larger picture, however, is of dynamics driving greater division in the world. In similar vein, the Financial Times in a recent editorial described "serious failings of international coordination and cooperation" as a danger in the context of the pandemic. But this is also more widely applicable to a world where the key strategic driver of events is tensions between big powers. Far from abating these have intensified — a trend also expected to assert itself in the year ahead. East-West tensions will continue to contribute to an increasingly fragmented international system.

The world's most consequential relationship is that between the US and China. The course of relations between them will be the most significant geopolitical dynamic in 2022. Their confrontation may take a more dangerous turn if tensions over Taiwan spin out of control despite efforts to manage them by high-level bilateral contacts. Most assessments see tensions between them as a top risk with their tech war leading to increasing bifurcation of the digital world. One result of their competition, according to Ian Bremmer, head of the Eurasia group, would be "a decoupling of the vying powers and a world where nations become more commercially aligned with either China or the United States". This in fact may be a key question this year — whether many countries will be obliged to fall into alignments with one or the other even if they may not want to choose between them.

A weak geopolitical order is a trend forecast by Control Risks, a UK-based consultancy group. It sees this as emerging from the absence of a dominant global power that sets the terms and conditions for global trade and international security. This in turn has resulted from "America's broader retreat into domestic concerns and pivot towards further east" as also "symbolised by its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan". One consequence is increased chances of regional or local intra-state conflicts erupting or intensifying. The IISS survey for example sees this trend epitomised by Ethiopia's internal conflict. Others see possibilities of longer-standing regional flashpoints threatening international stability.

Technological shifts will continue by leaps and bounds even as Big Tech will be exposed to greater scrutiny for both its monopolistic practices and harmful content. The Wall Street Journal described this as one of last year's main tech events that will shape the future. The Economist report calls it a Techlash. Even so, the digital world that became so pervasive in people's lives in the pandemic will continue to influence the way people work, communicate, entertain themselves and shop.

Another trend is of escalating humanitarian crises in different parts of the world which is highlighted in several assessments especially by UN agencies. Humanitarian needs are expected to reach a record level in the year ahead, the result of a combination of conflict, pandemic and climate change. The UN's relief agency OCHA has launched an appeal for an unprecedented \$41 billion to help 183 million people who need life-saving assistance across the world. Among these the dire situation in Afghanistan stands out, which has been worsening despite recent international efforts to step up humanitarian aid. The geopolitical consequences of a humanitarian catastrophe are all too apparent. In its list of the top 12 risks for 2022 the Washington-based Atlantic Council points to the danger of state collapse in Afghanistan with far-reaching repercussions for the world.

The likely trends in 2022 mean that the world will remain in an unsettled and volatile phase in which overlapping challenges will test governments at a time when international solidarity and leadership will be in short supply.

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

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US Global Retreat? By Javid Husain

THE end of the US military occupation of Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power has ignited an intense debate on the future goals and directions of US foreign policy. The main question is whether the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan portends the weakening of the US resolve, the diminution of its power and the curtailment of its worldwide commitments to maintain its global domination and uphold the world order established by it together with its allies in the aftermath of World War II.

It is worth recalling that the Soviet Union's military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 ultimately led to its defeat in the Cold War and its disintegration. But the USSR was in a uniquely weak position when it encountered its military setback in Afghanistan. Economically it was in a state of decline, strategically it was overstretched, internationally it was isolated, and ideologically and politically it was a sick state, riven with dissensions. The Soviet military debacle in Afghanistan delivered the coup de grâce to a political edifice which was ripe for collapse.

The US is committed to a policy of containment of China.

The US position is not comparable to that of the Soviet Union after its military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Despite the strategic blunders which led to its unceremonious retreat from Afghanistan, the US economy remains the biggest in the world with the most advanced technologies and enormous worldwide influence both bilaterally and multilaterally through international political and financial institutions. Its economy together with that of the European Union, which is closely allied with the US, accounts for about 45 per cent of the world GDP.

Militarily also, the US is the most powerful nation in the world. Its advantage over its rivals increases if one takes into account the support of its allies. If one combines the US hard power with its soft power, it remains and is likely to remain ahead of any challenger for the next two to three decades at least. So it would be a huge mistake to underrate America's power and worldwide influence or to predict a precipitate US retreat from its commitments abroad during this period.

However, in China, which has registered dramatically high economic growth over the past four decades and is now rapidly building up its military power and

developing advanced technologies, the US faces a formidable challenger in the economic, technological and military fields in the long run. If the present trends continue, the tipping point in favour of China may come sometime after 2050 when China would emerge as the most powerful country in the world economically and militarily. Undoubtedly, the growing US-China rivalry would be the defining feature of international politics in the 21st century. This is not to deny the strategic implications of an assertive Russia, which under Vladimir Putin is resisting the eastward expansion of Nato, especially into Ukraine, and the possibility of the emergence of other major powers.

The strategic challenge from China will come in the form of demands for the restructuring of the present US-dominated world order to accommodate China's legitimate political, security, economic, financial and commercial interests. These demands will be resisted by the US. Consequently, the Indo-Pacific region is likely to witness growing tensions and even local conflicts because of such issues as Taiwan and China's attempts to expand its power in its southern and eastern peripheries.

As reflected in President Joe Biden's recent conversation with his Chinese counterpart, the US is firmly committed to the policy of containment of China. It is, therefore, strengthening its alliances in the Indo-Pacific region in the form of Quad and Aukus. The growing US-India strategic partnership is part of the American grand design to contain China.

In the short to medium-term, the US because of the favourable balance of power may successfully resist the strategic challenge from China. However, if the present trends continue, the US in the long run will be forced to adjust its policies and curtail its commitments abroad to accommodate China's legitimate interests.

Pakistan has no choice but to seek closer strategic cooperation with China to correct the power imbalance that the US policies are creating in our region because of its growing strategic cooperation with India. CPEC against this background carries enormous strategic and economic benefits for Pakistan. However, Pakistan should also simultaneously do its best to maintain friendly relations and cooperation with the US in areas where their interests are convergent while being mindful of both the potential and limitations of such cooperation in the emerging strategic scenario.

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What Does the Future Hold For Muslim Countries? By Talat Masood

It would not be an exaggeration that there is hardly any serious introspection among the Muslims that their countries and Muslims as people are lagging in all essential fields that contribute toward national development. Most Muslim nations are heavily dependent economically either on the US, European Union, China or Russia. Even those that are economically affluent such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are relying mostly on foreign firms and assistance to exploit their oil and mineral wealth. Nineteen of the African countries with Islam as the religion of the majority — Mauritania, Somalia, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, Libya, Niger and Egypt — are seriously struggling with their economies that could collapse if foreign support were not forthcoming. The state of dependence of Pakistan needs no elaboration. For seventy-five years of our existence, we have not been able to develop a self-sustaining economy. Even now we are desperately seeking a few billion dollars of assistance from the IMF under strict conditionalities. This is despite our inherent strength of geography, talented people, professional military and nuclear power. Afghanistan is perhaps the worst case of perpetual economic dependence on foreign assistance.

As nothing comes free all these dependent Muslim countries must pursue policies that demand curbing their long-term economic and political ambitions. Moreover, the nature of foreign assistance is essentially keeping them afloat but not necessarily bailing them out from dependence in the foreseeable future.

Politically too they are decades behind the developed world or progressive countries. With one or two exceptions, none of the Muslim countries can claim to be democratic. Many are still kingdoms, and these too survive not as much from the support of their people as from foreign powers and by imposing strict political control or resorting to military rule. It's a vicious bind that may not be easy to get rid of as it suits the rulers and their foreign patrons. Tunisia is one exception among the Middle Eastern countries because Tunisians managed to overthrow the monarchy. However, they are still struggling to establish a peaceful democratic order.

In terms of education especially in the field of science and technology, the contribution of Muslim countries is practically non-existent. This is one of the major reasons for their lagging behind. With the global economy being essentially knowledge-based this weakness needs to be addressed on a high priority. There is a school of thought that the rulers of Muslim countries deliberately deny their people education as it opens new opportunities and horizons for them and becomes difficult to manage their rising aspirations. A few years ago, the Saudi government in collaboration with top US and Western universities set up world-class colleges and universities. They hired professors of repute, but it failed to take off. In Pakistan, the education system from the primary to the university level is in a state of acute crisis with the government experimenting with the curriculum, which will most likely take it further down. The Prime Minister's priority is to introduce his vision of Riyasat-i-Madina. What is missing is the efforts at reducing illiteracy as more than 30% of the population in Pakistan cannot read or write. This is a fundamental weakness with long-term consequences. Science and technology, subjects related to space, and new developments in IT that will keep the students updated and would enhance their knowledge and interests have been put on the back burner. Efforts are being made in Pakistan to bring changes in the type of religious education that is imparted at the schools and to reform the madrassas. Teaching at the madrassas has unfortunately promoted rote learning rather than a deeper understanding of religion and its great virtues.

Muslim countries due to outdated education systems are certainly lagging in areas that trigger innovation and development. Now their greatest challenge is how to relate to the fast-changing world. We need to remind ourselves that the Islamic world had a headstart in the Middle Ages and was advanced mathematically. Islamic scholars were known for being well-versed in astronomy and several branches of science. The decline started as their rulers strayed into incompetence and poor governance.

Some of the oil-rich Muslim countries with the help of foreign experts have managed to introduce the most advanced technologies and systems in running airports and railways, and creating an aura of modernity. However, they cannot keep pace with the new developments on their own and have to rely heavily on Western or Chinese assistance. True, this has injected new life into their economies and given a sense of pride and confidence, but its continuity would depend on the exploitation of their oil and gas revenues and development of the human resource. The oil sector exploitation has been possible from the know-how,

machinery and equipment acquired from the West, Russian or Chinese sources, but that would require creating a strong educational network in the country if it is being sustained indigenously.

Pakistan has developed an elaborate infrastructure in the oil and gas sector with Western, Russian and Chinese assistance. Our engineers and experts in oil-related fields match the competence of foreign compatriots. We need to focus more on indigenous programmes and innovation and develop a long-term perspective and political consensus amongst major political parties. A similar approach of promoting indigenisation must be adopted in other fields — automobiles, electronics, avionics and communication hardware and software. Consistency in policies would be possible if major political parties are taken on board and has the support of state institutions and provinces. Technology-driven programmes can be better managed if there exists a critical mass of the educated population.

The world of today is highly complex and competitive. The independence of Muslim countries would essentially depend on the strength of their political and economic systems and governments that support a broad-based, scientific and technological education system and infrastructure.

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US-Russia Rivalry Over Ukraine & NATO's Expansion By Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi

UKRAINE has been pivotal to determining the scope of relationship between Russia and the US. Russia's security policy makers have currently published a draft agreement — proposing to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) — measures to ensure a model of bilateral security structure.

In this regard, Russia has asked NATO to refrain from further eastward enlargement, including the accession of Ukraine, and to cease any military activity in Ukraine and other countries in the Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Moscow has strongly suggested that Russia and NATO must reaffirm that they do not consider each other as adversaries.

Russia and the NATO member states as of May 27, 1997, would be banned from military deployment and weaponry on the territory of any European state.

For more than 20 years, the narrative of the alleged “broken promise” of not enlarging NATO eastward is part and parcel of Russia's post-Soviet identity. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this narrative has resurfaced in the context of the Ukraine crisis.

On November 30th 2021, a report published by Reuters ‘Putin warns Russia will act if NATO crosses its red lines in Ukraine’ said that Putin mentioned what is at stake if NATO expands eastward while they deployed the Aegis Ashore missile defence systems in Poland and Romania’.

From the Western perspective, NATO has, gradually and systematically taken up some defensive and proportionate steps in response to a changed security environment in the European continent and beyond.

In response to Russia's use of military force against its neighbours, Allies requested a greater NATO presence in the Baltic region. In 2016, we deployed

four multinational battle groups – or “enhanced forward presence” – to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

In 2017, the battle groups became fully operational. More than 4,500 troops from Europe and North America work closely together with home defence forces.

The NATO security policy specialists argue that the Russian policies in Europe are incoherent and attached to models of European security that have little or no relevance to other states or that actually alarm them.

Russia still disdains the small states, thinking them to be of no consequence, proposes infeasible and objectionable schemes of the European collective security that do not bind it but would bind NATO, and at the same time pursues unilateralist spheres of influence policies in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

A frank analysis suggests that Russian policy is openly revisionist— demanding border revisions and refusing to sign formal border treaties to recognize the post-1989 changes in Central and Eastern Europe.

Its spokesmen make demands for an exceptional position in Europe or for unworkable security systems that do little to advance faith in Russia’s coherence or goodwill.

Furthermore, its policy statements reveal a continuing addiction to old-fashioned doctrines of zero-sum games, of viewing everything in terms of correlations of antagonistic military forces, and of desires for exclusive rights over small states.

Whereas NATO’s policy process—the new NATO-Russia Council—that remarkably prefigured the final agreement on the Council in May 1997.

Unfortunately, those terms went far beyond giving Russia “a voice but not a veto” and certainly made it clear that Germany will not accept Baltic membership in NATO anytime soon.

Indeed, German Foreign Ministry officials speaking in Moscow openly alluded to the need not to do anything that wounds Russian sensitivities, explicitly giving Russia a veto on future expansion.

Thus, it is unlikely that Germany will ever shoulder the responsibilities of helping to underpin a security regime that is viable for the Baltics.

As for NATO's presence in Eastern Europe, US/NATO security specialists argue it is at the request of the host nations, and Allied forces uphold the highest standards of conduct, both on and off duty.

As part of NATO Allies' commitment to transparency, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania host Russian arms control inspectors.

In Estonia, for instance, Russian inspectors recently conducted a Vienna Document Inspection, observing parts of exercise Spring Storm in May and June 2021.

Discerning the likelihood of potential Russian reactions has been nevertheless a vital component of any analysis regarding which posture enhancements the United States and NATO should pursue.

As for Ukraine, for the last twenty years, it has shown its geopolitical tilt towards the West vindicated by the fact that Ukraine's current President, Volodymyr Zelensky, has pushed back against Russia's attempts to expand its influence.

The Western opinion holds that Putin wants a Cold War-like treaty with NATO—a move that can stop US-NATO military cooperation with Ukraine—yet seems a gigantic challenge for the Biden Administration.

Ukrainian intelligence services have alleged the Kremlin of aggressive actions on the border with Ukraine, including troop build-up.

However, it was estimated that potential Russian reaction could run the gamut, from tacit acceptance of US-NATO actions and a reduction in any willingness to consider an attack on NATO, to a sharp increase in nearby Russian forces designed to counterbalance the US-NATO moves, to a precipitous escalation to direct conflict.

The fact remains that despite its overall military advantages, NATO faces a clear imbalance in conventional capabilities in regions bordering Russia, such as the Baltics.

On the other hand, Finland, a Nordic country insists its right to join NATO in defiance of Russia. Whereas, Turkey an old NATO's member, is not comfortable with its policies.

Washington will impose "severe economic harm" on Russia and boost its military presence in Eastern Europe should Moscow invade Ukraine, the White House warned. But it appears that this American warning is unworkable.

Arguably, Russia and NATO members have had more than two decades of post-Soviet strategic interactions, including notable conflicts in Kosovo, Georgia and Ukraine, and several rounds of NATO expansion, all of which occurred alongside substantial variation in relative Russian economic and military capabilities.

The core of US-Russia rivalry is NATO's article 5 of collective defence since the strategists in Moscow view that the European security culture has been much changed since 1949, is evident from the fact that some of the European states, particularly Germany, does not intend to depend on NATO as far as their security interests are concerned.

To some of the European security analysts, NATO's eastward enlargement is nothing but Washington's Trojan horse in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, a restraint strategy is a wise option to resolve the crisis.

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Source: Published in Pak Observer

Iran-US: No Exit? – OpEd By Joseph Solis-Mullen

To borrow from that wiliest of ex-bishops turned statesmen, Charles de Talleyrand, George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq was worse than a crime: it was a mistake. Twenty years after 9/11, American military and foreign policy leaders are still struggling to resurrect something of the functionally stable balance of power in the region that preceded their 2003 ouster of Saddam's Baathist regime. While all signs point to the U.S. increasingly losing interest, its increasing desire to focus on southeast Asia is likely to be disrupted by the nagging issue of Iran's nuclear program.

Since Trump's 2018 abrogation of the arduously negotiated Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action destroyed any goodwill his predecessor had generated by signing the deal, Iran has proceeded with its enrichment and regional influence operations.

As things stand, even a return to the original agreement – something many are calling for – doesn't seem possible. Having successfully weathered the worst Trump could throw at it short of direct armed intervention, Tehran refuses to come back to the deal without U.S. concessions. On the one hand, this is reasonable as it was Trump who pulled out of the deal. Likewise, with the threat of a possible 2024 Trump presidential bid, Tehran is understandably nervous any agreement struck with the Biden administration will be likewise terminated were Trump to retake the office. For his part, Biden doesn't dare yield ground. Geostrategic advantages aside, Trump successfully campaigned against the Iran deal negotiated by the Obama administration and Biden can ill afford undertaking such a politically risking initiative as concessions to Tehran in the present environment.

That being the case, returning to the deal is the only realistic, peaceful solution to the present situation, and leaders in both countries should commit the political capital necessary to getting it done. Biden should take the deal to cool tensions, as the present course is likely to see the U.S. further sucked back into the Middle East. It also isn't clear he would suffer domestically for doing so if the alternative presented is that of yet another Middle Eastern conflict to a war-wearied American public. As far as Tehran is concerned, it should eschew its own maximalist position. Trump's only hurt the U.S. position, and Iran's is likely to do the same. While its

frustration is understandable, returning to the deal provides Tehran nothing but benefits and changes nothing about the material facts.

After all, we're talking about information and technology that has been available since the 1940s. If it doesn't already have them, Iran is probably capable of building nuclear weapons within months and likely has been for years. Domestically, hardliners should be made to see that Iran's greatest present need is economic, not geopolitical. Repeated bouts of sanctions and its exertions in Syria and elsewhere have left the country drained. In fact, Iran's experience has been so hard on its domestic population that the tenuously perched Sunni Gulf Monarchies may have been convinced by the ordeal that pursuing a weapons program of their own is not worth the risk.

This last part will be key. The anti-Israel rhetoric of right-wing populists such as Ahmadinejad aside, the most likely reason Iran wants a nuclear deterrent is because it knows what happens to regimes who oppose Washington without one – or who give them up, like Gaddafi. Just as the region has gotten used to pretending Israel doesn't have nuclear weapons, the U.S. should focus its efforts on acclimating Gulf allies to the reality of the situation. An arms race would only make everything worse. The finances of Iran are terrible, Syria is destroyed, Erdogan is driving Turkey's economy into the ground, and Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States have been trying increasingly to devote the oil money coming in towards building high-tech economies in preparation for the post-fossil fuel era. In short, no one can afford it. As for Israel, it has plenty of domestic issues to sort out.

The Thirty Years War, to which this present series of interconnected conflicts in the Middle East is sometimes compared, was only brought to an end by recognition of the territorial sovereignty of states. Once the primary sticking point to any stable Middle Eastern order, Israel is well on its way to recognition. Today, the Gulf Monarchies and Israel bristle at the mention of Iranian nuclear weapons, decrying the potential of regional Iranian hegemony. But this could not be so: the balance of forces that would array against it would be too large, with Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia leading an eager following. All have networks and spheres of influence – some of which overlap. And the key to stabilizing relations in the region among the powers is working to resolve those areas of overlap without allowing the disagreements to break down to the point of open conflict – or allowing existing conflicts to spread into wider regional conflagrations.

Whatever the solution, much like the Thirty Years War, it may be easiest for the regional powers to establish a balance they are all comfortable with without the looming prospect, or fear, of military intervention by an outside balancer – be it the U.S., Russia, or maybe even China. Indeed, formal and informal regional meetings have been taking place since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Returning to the deal would be a signal to the Iranians and regional allies that Washington both takes Iran's interests seriously and is doing what it can in a constrained political environment to play its part in facilitating the dialogues and compromises necessary to forge a durable balance of power in the region.

*A graduate of Spring Arbor University and the University of Illinois, Joseph Solis-Mullen is a political scientist and current graduate student in the economics department at the University of Missouri. An independent researcher and journalist, his work can be found at the Ludwig Von Mises Institute, Eurasian Review, Libertarian Institute, and Sage Advance. You can contact him through his website <http://www.jsmwritings.com> or find him on Twitter.

Source: Published in Eur Asia Review

Russia-West Talks | Editorial

WHILE for the most part the parleys between Russia and the Western alliance this week may simply be talks about talks, considering the fragility of the situation in Ukraine the engagement is a far better alternative than the exchange of bellicosity. On Monday senior diplomats from Russia and the US met in Geneva, while engagements between Moscow and Nato, as well as Russia and the OSCE are also on the cards. The Western bloc fears Russia is planning to invade Ukraine — something Moscow denies — while Russia is wary that Nato is now sitting on its doorstep. Therefore, the level of mistrust on both sides is immense, while the exchange of mutually hostile rhetoric has been considerable. In such a scenario, talks on multiple levels are the best option for de-escalation.

It can be argued that the current standoff between Russia and the West over Ukraine is a continuation of Cold War rivalries, when both camps competed for spheres of influence across the globe. It is a fact that Nato has now absorbed once staunch pillars of the Warsaw Pact, something that does not sit too well with Moscow. Furthermore, Russia has often reacted militarily to real and perceived threats, such as annexing Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Plainly put, the West wants to expand further into what were once Soviet states and satellites, while Russia, which is the successor state of the USSR, wants the US and Western Europe to stay out of its 'near abroad'. Unless cooler heads prevail, this conflict can spiral into something bigger, which is why the engagement between the two sides this week is a positive sign. However, there should be no illusions as a wide gulf of mistrust still separates both sides. For example, while the Nato chief said it was "possible to make deals with Russia", he added that an invasion of Ukraine would entail "severe costs". To prevent a larger conflict, the Western bloc must assure Russia that Nato's expansion is not aimed at containing it, while Moscow also needs to respect Ukraine's sovereignty. Should neither side back down, the conflict has within it the seeds of a much more destructive conflagration. Moreover, all sides need to shed the Cold War mentality and work for a more peaceful international order. Already the globe is beset by numerous crises and conflicts. A new flare-up in Europe is definitely not needed.

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UN and Kashmir's Right to Self-Determination By Prof Dr Muhammad Khan

WORLD War-II ended with an estimated killing of 70–85 million people all over the globe. Historians estimate that 50–56 million people died due to direct fighting between opposing forces and another 19–28 million deaths took place because of war-related diseases and famine.

At this deadly end of WW-II, the war victors thought of having an organization which could stop occurrence of another world war. In the same perspective the United Nations Organisation (UNO) was established as regulating body to regulate the international conflicts.

Unlike the League of Nations, the Charter of UNO was further distinguished and refined with the inclusion of an exceptional humanitarian clause; the 'right of self-determination' which was unique in nature and became a cause for the decolonization of the colonial world.

Establishment of India and Pakistan were also the result of this decolonization process in August 1947.

Unfortunately, ever since the decolonisation of subcontinent, the people of Jammu and Kashmir are demanding their right of self-determination.

Kashmiris trace back this prized right from the resolutions of United Nations which was accredited from the UN Charter.

Owing to its paramount significance, the right of self-determination was secured in article 1 of the UN Charter with a universal application, where Kashmiris cannot be made as an exception.

The global decolonization started immediately after establishment of the UNO mainly because of the right of self-determination. Right of self-determination is the legal right of the people for deciding their future destination.

It is the essence of international law, arising from customary international law, secured in a number of international treaties and agreements. Kashmiris' right of self-determination is also secured in UN resolutions, treaties and commitments of Indian leadership.

In the light of UN-mandated right to self-determination, the people of Jammu and Kashmir too had a right to determine their own destiny, their own political status and their own economic, cultural and social developmental model.

The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) through its Resolution of January 5, 1949 guaranteed a free and fair plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir with the sole objective of granting the people of Jammu and Kashmir their right to self-determination.

This is the inalienable right; the people of Jammu and Kashmir had in 1947 and valid today in 2022 as well.

The only obstacle in the exercise of this right is Indian obduracy, which has constantly caused a barrier since the passage of UNCIP Resolution on 05 January 1949. Since its establishment in 1945, the United Nations has ensured grant of this right to over 100 states.

This is clear from UN membership; it had 51 countries as its members in October 1945 and today in 2022, there are 193 countries form the member states of this international organization.

In all cases, the right of self-determination formed the basis of such a large international community.

The only question, people of Jammu and Kashmir ask today from the UN and its 193 member States that after all why they have been deprived of this inalienable right of self-determination, enshrined in the UN Charter and UN resolutions.

UNCIP Resolution of 05 January, 1949 was corollary to UNCIP Resolution dated 13 August 1948. Indeed, after passage of this resolution (13 August 1948), India and Pakistan gave their recommendations for the smooth conduct of plebiscite in the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir which were incorporated in the resolution of 05 January 1949.

This UNCIP resolution was unanimously adopted by members of the Commission thus had no confusion in implementation.

Since India took the Kashmir dispute to UN on 01 January 1948 on the sole plea that Maharaja of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to India on 26 October 1947 through an Instrument of Accession.

The truth is quite different, since Maharaja did not sign the instrument before 27 October 1947, the day India invaded the state in the early hours. India was sure to just have a walk-over upon presentation of this so-called instrument of accession at the UN.

But, during the debate over the dispute between Pakistani and Indian representative, UN came to know about the reality of Indian occupation of the former Princely State and consent of the people of the state, which run counter to Indian narrative and claim.

Moreover, even in the so-called instrument of accession, the will of the people was to be kept as the supreme about their future status.

The UNCIP resolutions (13 August 1948 and 05 January 1949) were indeed the rejection of the Indian stance over Kashmir.

Through these resolutions, United Nations made Kashmiris as the basic and principal party; the real decision makers for their future political status.

The so-called instrument of accession, India presented and used to justify its invasion into the Princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was not accepted by UN.

At the UN two concurrent happenings took place as a result of Indian reference to Kashmir case; one, Indian efforts to get UN authenticity of its military invasion into Kashmir was overruled and two, instrument of accession was not accepted as the legal document for the accession of the state with the Indian Union.

This happened despite Lord Mountbatten was still the Governor General of Independent India. Lord Louis Mountbatten remained Governor General of India from 15 August 1947 to 21 June 1948.

Despite unlawful annexation of IIOJK by India in August 2019, Kashmiris are determined to get their right of self-determination.

In order to suppress their struggle for their right of self-determination, India is carrying out systematic genocide of Kashmiris through; fake encounters, custodial killings, shoot to kill, arrest and torture, rape of women folk and targeting the Kashmiri youth.

Besides, India is undertaking massive demographic changes in IIOJK which is yet another violation of the UN Charter, UN resolutions on Kashmir, Fourth Geneva Convention and International Law.

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Source: Published in Pak Observer

An Update on the Current Status of **Afghanistan By Dr Farah Naz**

SINCE August 15, 2021, Afghanistan has not stabilized. The haphazard way of US/NATO forces withdrawal left behind a mountain of miseries, the collapse of institutions and humanitarian crisis.

The question is who to blame: the outgoing party (US) or the incoming party (Taliban). The US is sitting on the Afghan funds while the Taliban is struggling to get recognition and overcome the multi-dimensional issues that cannot be resolved overnight.

Then what should be done where the international forces are trying not to let Afghanistan stabilize while Pakistan, being a neighbour, is trying to provide humanitarian assistance and all sorts of help that can help stabilize Afghanistan.

From Zahir Shah to Daoud Khan, from Nur Mohammad Taraki to Hafizullah Amin, from Babrak Karmal to Mohammad Najibullah, Afghanistan has been on the thrones of war and chaos.

The Afghans have had more than enough misery at the hands of great powers playing their games. The pain of Afghans does not move anywhere – they faced the lethal atrocities from 1979-1989 at the hands of the (former)

Soviet Union and from 2001 to 2021 at the hands of the US and its western war machines of the 46 allies with 11 supporting nations.

The western powers have misused Afghanistan's situation to defame the Taliban's Interim set-up and are now raising concerns that an uprising will come in the form of Afghan Spring.

But, Afghans had many such springs in the past four decades. It is time that the western states must apologize as civilized societies for atrocities they left behind. Here the issue is how humanity can be so insensitive yet civilized.

The 2020 Doha Agreement marked the end of the American century where America kind of legitimized the Taliban as a legit force to restore Afghan territory.

After the Doha Agreement, the Taliban followed every clause of the agreement which earned global applause despite the American media portraying the Taliban as an extremist force/outfit.

Then why see the Taliban as a problem rather than utilize them as a solution? Looks like the superpower of today is not accepting its fall in Kabul. But, is it justified to punish Afghans for their fall?

The reasons for Afghan Interim Government non-recognition are for three valid concerns. But every society has its trajectory of revolution. In the West, women got voting rights in the 20th century. No less than a trajectory that the Afghan Interim government is yet not recognized but still expected to carry out the wish list.

They need to get recognition by the international community and then engage in systematic menace with assistance to nation-building. This is a logical way of dealing with the issues which affected the whole region in general and Pakistan in particular.

What we see are some efforts by the western power lackeys, intelligence agencies and diplomatic missions to create a chaotic situation to precipitate the refugee exodus from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

It's an open secret that Pakistan is under pressure not to let the Afghan Interim Government stabilize as the American-led western nations want continued disorder in Afghanistan to serve their objectives of keeping Pakistan under constant pressure and denied any trade/economic activity opening towards Central Asia and beyond.

Recently, the Durand Line caught media attention with two incidents when the Taliban commanders tried to stop fencing and seized barbed wire.

Pakistani officials held talks with the Taliban authorities on the matter after the first incident last month and both sides agreed on proceeding with fencing through mutual understanding on its alignment.

The issue has long been settled in the past when Mortimer Durand established the Durand Line in 1893 as an international border between British India and the Emirate of Afghanistan to fix the limit of their respective spheres of influence and improve diplomatic relations.

Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar (ISPR Chief) reaffirmed the resolve to complete fencing of the 2,600km-long border with Afghanistan, downplaying recent events of removal of the fence and obstruction of the construction work by the Taliban fighters as “localized issues”.

If the Durand Line is not accepted as an international border, all other borders may not be accepted too. Is the issue artificially raised creating a hostile environment between Pakistan and Afghanistan where Pakistan stands firmly in supporting Afghans during the humanitarian crisis?

Some elements in the Afghan set-up are prodded to take a hostile stance against Pakistan. The anti-Pakistan elements in the Taliban, bureaucracy and commanders are encouraged by India and others to kick up the stance.

While the western powers are hell-bent on creating a new phase of chaos in Afghanistan which they failed to achieve in the past two decades.

Pakistan should understand the strategic game being played in Afghanistan’s contemporary history and remain assured that the West will not accept the Afghan Government, come what may.

For Pakistan, accepting the Afghan Government seems to have long-term benefits such as focusing on mutual economic development and opposing the Indian hegemonic ambitions in the region.

As Hamid Karzai once said that Pakistan and Afghanistan are twins but joined on the hips. The continuation of Afghan-West hostility is not in the best interest of any country in the world more so for Pakistan.

Pakistan has suffered enough due to the machination of the great power in the region for decades but does not have the luxury to be a tool in their hands for the rest of 21st century. It is important that Pakistan take the lead in setting things right with a forceful well-thought policy with strategic reasoning to resolve the issue.

The resolution lies in the following seven policy initiatives as a precursor to ignite an era of peace/prosperity/security in the region: 1) early recognition that should have been done during the OIC summit; 2) Stop US-led western efforts to destabilize Afghanistan; 3) Removal of trade embargo; 4) removal of the ban on \$9.5 Billion Afghan money as the UN also appealed to grant \$5 Billion aid to the Afghanistan in 2022; 5) constructive engagement with Afghan Taliban for the reforms on women empowerment, education and minority rights; 6) martial plan for Afghanistan with a firm understanding and commitment by the western powers who had more than enough sharing in causing the misery; 7) regional conference of the neighbours to accord recognition as the first step for eventual global recognition.

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Source: Published in pak observer

Washington's Missing China Strategy By

Richard Fontaine

The Biden administration has repeatedly identified China as the United States' foremost foreign policy challenge. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has referred to China as the Pentagon's top priority. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has described China as "the biggest geopolitical test" of the twenty-first century. And President Joe Biden himself has stated that he envisions "extreme competition" between Washington and Beijing. As his administration prepares to issue a raft of strategy documents—including for national security, national defense, and the Indo-Pacific—it is widely expected to single out China for special attention.

To invoke the U.S.-Chinese rivalry as a defining feature of today's world is now commonplace, and analysts and policymakers across the political spectrum support the United States' shift away from engagement and toward competition. Jettisoning Washington's previous strategy of cooperation and integration, premised as it was on the eventual transformation of Chinese behavior, is a rare point of agreement between the Trump and Biden administrations.

That is a welcome shift, given the paucity of positive results yielded by the previous approach. China and the United States are in a largely competitive relationship, and U.S. policy aims to respond to Chinese actions more than to shape them. A strategy grounded in this reality—one that combines a U.S.-led coalition with targeted, issue-specific efforts to contest Chinese assertiveness—is now emerging to protect U.S. interests and values.

There is, however, a glaring omission in the new policy: an objective. Competition is merely a description of U.S.-Chinese relations, not an end in itself. Conspicuously absent from the flurry of recent pronouncements is the endgame that Washington ultimately seeks with China. Without a clearly defined goal, any overarching strategy is likely to waste resources, frustrate attempts to track progress, and elude the broad-based domestic support necessary to sustain it. U.S. allies and partners wish—and deserve—to know the objective of the coalitions in which Washington increasingly seeks to enlist them. The absence of a clear goal for its self-proclaimed top priority is a liability for the Biden administration—and one that it should urgently work to address.

EYES ON THE PRIZE

Good strategies articulate a desired end state and outline how to attain it. In his famous 1947 Foreign Affairs article, for instance, the diplomat and historian George Kennan argued for “either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power,” to be pursued through a policy of containment and an effort to increase the strains under which the Soviets operated. Establishing such an objective, as the United States did early in the Cold War, explicitly ruled out other possible goals, such as a partnership and political intimacy between Washington and Moscow on the one hand or the active rollback of communism on the other. Having identified the collapse or moderation of Moscow’s regime as their aim, U.S. officials pursued containment as the strategy most likely to yield those positive results.

After the end of the Cold War, the United States established a set of objectives for China and theorized about how to achieve them. In 1997, U.S. President Bill Clinton said that Washington’s goal vis-à-vis Beijing “is not containment and conflict; it is cooperation,” noting that “a pragmatic policy of engagement” was most likely to bring that about. By engaging Beijing, primarily but not exclusively through trade, the Clinton administration aimed to cultivate a “stable, open, and non-aggressive” China. U.S. policymakers postulated that such openness might even foster liberalization and political pluralism within China itself.

The George W. Bush administration largely retained the goal of a cooperative and liberalizing China, adding to it a wish that the country would become a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system. Washington would seek areas of active cooperation with Beijing across the spectrum of global challenges from terrorism to energy conservation in hopes that Chinese leaders would become invested and active in addressing them. Perhaps less certain than its predecessor in the prospects for cooperation, the Bush administration hedged its bets by boosting U.S. military capabilities and bolstering alliances and partnerships throughout Asia.

Competition is merely a description of U.S.-Chinese relations, not an end in itself. The Obama administration shared many of the Bush administration’s objectives, but it hedged even more heavily as doubts about Beijing’s direction and goals grew. Still, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rejected the notion of an adversarial Beijing, saying that it was “essential” for the United States and China to have “a positive, cooperative relationship.” The administration announced a “pivot” or

“rebalance” to Asia aimed at forging such a relationship by embedding it in a “regional framework of security alliances, economic networks, and social connections” that would strengthen the United States’ position.

President Donald Trump ushered in a new era of U.S.-Chinese relations. His administration neither sought a cooperative relationship with Beijing nor pursued engagement as a central means of securing U.S. interests. Rejecting the notion that integration into the global order would spur either Chinese liberalization or responsible international behavior, the Trump administration labeled Beijing a “revisionist power” with which the United States would have a fundamentally competitive relationship. Trump’s Indo-Pacific strategy, declassified in the waning days of his presidency, takes malign Chinese activity as a given to be resisted, often in concert with partners. The Trump administration was no model of message discipline, however, and key policymakers differed on the desired end state. Whereas Trump predicted in 2020 that his bilateral trade deal would “bring both the U.S. and China closer together in so many other ways,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that same year that the United States “must induce China to change” and suggested that efforts to replace the regime in Beijing might be on the table.

To be sure, any brief review of the past several administrations’ China policies risks attributing a coherence and continuity to their strategies that did not always exist. Governments are not unitary actors, objectives and approaches change with shifting circumstances and players, and public pronouncements can conflict with private aims. Yet for much of the time since the end of the Cold War and, particularly, during the years of U.S. engagement with China, Washington’s objectives with regard to Beijing were generally explicit. That is simply not the case today.

FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The fate of the U.S.-Chinese relationship has profound global implications, and so the objective of U.S. policy should flow from the kind of order Washington wishes to obtain—and the kind of threat China poses to that order. The United States generally seeks to maintain a global order governed by rules rather than by brute power, one in which countries enjoy sovereignty, disputes are resolved peacefully, markets are open to trade, human rights are considered universal, and democracy can flourish. Although the United States’ own track record in upholding such principles is hardly perfect, the country has nevertheless championed them as

ideals that should govern international behavior. Since the 1940s, Washington has opposed hostile spheres of influence emerging in Eurasia precisely because they threaten the United States' desired rules-based order. The overarching goal of U.S. policy today should be to preserve the core pillars of the international order, even as specific rules and institutions change and adapt.

From that overarching goal should flow the objective of U.S. policy toward China. Given China's growing military and technological power, its assertive behavior, its economic interdependence with the United States and its allies, and the incompatibility of many Chinese actions with the existing order, it is past time for Washington to articulate an objective that is both realistic and protective of its people. The aim of U.S. policy toward China should be to ensure that Beijing is either unwilling or unable to overturn the regional and global order.

China might cease trying to overturn elements of the liberal order if its leaders come to see the strength of the countries that are committed to them and the vigor with which they oppose China's efforts to disrupt them. Beijing might someday even see its own future in the preservation of the liberal order. And even if it does not, it could grow incapable of undermining the order for any number of reasons: due to Beijing's own weaknesses, the unpalatability of its authoritarian vision in other countries, or a relative strengthening of the powers committed to the liberal status quo.

The objective of U.S. policy should flow from the kind of order Washington wishes to obtain.

A China that is unwilling or unable to undermine the regional and global order is a fairly abstract goal for U.S. policy, but it would nonetheless rule out several other potential objectives. Washington would not aim to transform China into a liberal power or a responsible stakeholder in the international system. Washington would not work toward Cold War-style containment or regime change in Beijing. And it would not aim to stop China's rise but rather oppose Beijing's efforts to disrupt existing international arrangements in ways that damage the United States and its partners.

Progress toward this objective would almost certainly be a matter of degree, but it could be measured (unlike progress toward the broad notion of competition). China's approach to global rules and norms is varied, however. Beijing does not

seek to simply repeal and replace what currently exists but rather to reject some principles, accept others, and rewrite the remainder. Such subtlety should help define U.S. priorities, as Washington should focus on preserving those elements of the liberal order that are simultaneously of greatest importance to U.S. interests and under the most threat from Chinese behavior.

A new medium-term policy agenda would naturally flow from such a goal: the United States would seek to improve its military position in the Indo-Pacific relative to China; contest China's use of economic coercion, including through an ambitious regional trade policy that aims to reduce countries' reliance on the Chinese market; build new technology partnerships to ensure the free flow of information; and focus existing alliances on protecting democracies from external interference. Washington would, in other words, continue many of the efforts that currently fall under the broad umbrella of competition, but it would channel them toward resisting Chinese attempts to upend key elements of the liberal order.

All of this would entail a shift in how the Biden administration communicates—and thinks about—its China policy. The United States would not strictly be competing against China but would rather be working toward the preservation and extension of core international values that serve many other nations well. U.S. partners would not be required to break their ties with China in order to join a unified bloc, but they would be encouraged to join coalitions aimed at resisting Beijing on specific issues, such as economic coercion, military aggression, the spread of illiberal technologies, and human rights abuses. The accompanying message, despite Beijing's claims to the contrary, would be that Washington does not seek to suppress China's rise but rather to establish a U.S.-Chinese equilibrium in the long term.

RECKONING DAY

The United States and the world can live with a powerful China that does not attempt to overturn key principles of the liberal order. At the moment, however, that possibility seems remote. The military balance in the Indo-Pacific is shifting away from the United States and its allies and toward Beijing. China is becoming increasingly economically dominant in Asia, with Washington absent from any real leadership on trade. Chinese diplomacy is growing more coercive and more focused on the internal affairs of other countries, undermining their sovereignty and independence. Although cooperation with Beijing is desirable and theoretically possible, it is in very short supply, even in areas in which U.S. and Chinese

interests seem to overlap, such as climate change and pandemic disease. The overall picture is quite appealing to Beijing: a steadily eroding U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, accompanied by a steadily growing Chinese presence.

Reversing that trend is no easy task. It will take years and involve risks. Diplomacy can help mitigate these risks, but only to a limited degree; the United States will need to accept increased tension in the medium term in order to achieve a more stable equilibrium with China in the long term.

Every month, it seems, U.S. policymakers sound the alarm about the U.S.-Chinese relationship with greater volume. Across party lines and branches of government, many policymakers now endorse a major response to the China challenge. The watchwords are more resources, more speed, more vigor. All of this is appropriate. But Washington would do well to clarify what, precisely, this national effort aims to achieve.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

China and RCEP: Another Regional & Global Economic Stabilization By Dr Mehmood-ul-Hassan Khan

THE Chinese process of regional socio-economic integration and global economic stabilization and stimulation has now become a hot topic in the mass media. Unfortunately, the Western geopolitics is busy in mudslinging which will achieve nothing but a greater economic downturn for them.

From cost savings to greater market access, there will be clear benefits for all the member countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as the world's largest trade deal has been operationalized from January 1, 2022.

RCEP is an important agreement that will boost trade collaboration and integration within the region.

It will allow for greater transparency and facilitate services exports in areas such as professional services, computer and business services as well as logistics and distribution. It is a free trade agreement between the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members plus Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

According to Chinese official data (January 2022) it has further enhanced the economic potential of China's exporting provinces in the first week of implementation of the RCEP pact, as companies across China are thrilled at the tangible RCEP benefits. It seems that the recent economic boost and trade and commerce acceleration is the outcome of the recently implemented mega trade deal of RCEP. Interestingly, since the RCEP officially came into force on January 1, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) issued 275 RCEP certificates of origin for 135 Chinese enterprises from 18 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. Thus economic stabilization and stimulation flourishes.

In this connection, the RCEP pact took effect in Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Japan, Laos, New Zealand, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam on January 1, 2022. Interestingly, South Korea will follow on February 1, but Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines have yet to ratify the deal. However, seven ASEAN members and five other partners, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand which account for 30% of the world's economy have ratified the RCEP. The RCEP eliminates tariffs on about 90% of traded goods and standardizes many customs, investment, IP and e-commerce regulations.

It is hoped that by forming a single set of trade rules and simplifying complex issues such as rules of origin (CoO), the RCEP will further enhance the development of Regional Value Chain Systems (RVCS).

According to HSBC's latest report (December 2021), the RCEP covers nearly a third of the global population and about 30% of its global gross domestic product, but this is expected to rise to 50% by 2030. Thus economic prospects of the RCEP are positive which will also benefit macro-economy of all the participating countries in the days to come.

Interestingly, India withdrew from the deal at the end of 2020 amid concerns its economy could be flooded with cheap Chinese goods and farmers could be hurt by agricultural imports from Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, India's rejection of the RCEP is more about geopolitics instead of geo-economy.

Furthermore, the RCEP will promote trade and attract investments to all participants in ASEAN indeed. Hopefully it will further promote intra-region free trade. It will open a new chapter for regional economic and trade ties.

It estimates that trade is an important driver of growth for Asia, and RCEP's commencement will put Asia back on its pre-COVID growth trajectory. Intra-Asian trade, already larger than Asia's trade with North America and Europe put together, will receive a further boost with RCEP's standardized rules of origin. Moreover, RCEP will make it easier for firms to use Southeast Asia as a production base, and could accelerate the diversification of supply chains and the reallocation of FDIs already underway in Asia.

The pact should also help streamline existing free-trade agreements in Asia-Pacific and strengthen intraregional trade linkages. Additionally, foreign businesses may

also benefit from building production facilities in lower-cost ASEAN markets to make use of RCEP trade rules and preferences when trading within the region.

Beijing also said the deal will serve as “powerful leverage” for keeping trade and foreign investment stable in 2022, as it will expand exports of Chinese products while helping speed up China’s industrial transformation. Hainan Yanghang Industrial Company in South China’s Hainan Province has become the first enterprises to enjoy the zero tariff policies under RCEP.

It seems that the RCEP agreement will gradually lift tariffs for China’s imports of coconut milk, pineapple products and paper products from ASEAN countries. Consequently, RCEP will boost investment opportunities between China and other member states, as it ushers in wider access for foreign investors and increases policy transparency.

Imports and exports between China and the other 14 RCEP members totalled 10.96 trillion Yuan (US\$1.72 trillion) in the first 11 months of 2021, accounting for 31% of China’s total foreign trade value.

During 2022, ASEAN developing countries such as Brunei, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam which have ratified the agreement will eliminate about 75% of their tariffs on imported products from China. The remaining tariffs will be gradually eliminated over 20 years.

To conclude, it is suggested that RCEP should further consolidate different rules of origins in ASEAN+1 FTAs so that RCEP partners may take advantage of preferential tariffs. This is particularly important for the development of high-tech value chains such as electronics and automobiles, where parts and components are manufactured in different countries in the region. Therefore, the relatively high tariff liberalization coupled with harmonized rules of origin in RCEP should not only save costs and increase profits for traders, but also facilitate ASEAN firms’ participation in the regional and global value chains.

The RCEP is the largest economic bloc in the world. Even without India, the countries in the RCEP account for 30% of the world’s population, 29% of global GDP, 27% of global trade, and 29% of foreign direct investment (FDI). By comparison, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without the US (now called the CPTPP) represents only 7% of the world’s population, 13% of global GDP, 15% of

trade, and 20% of FDI. Thus economic and Trade and commerce comparative advantage of the RCEP is obvious as compared to other regional as well as global trade pacts.

Despite some regional speculations, global manipulations and propagation, the traditional labour-intensive sectors in Southeast Asia will also be benefiting from the RCEP, such as mechanical and textile industries.

RCEP is a giant step towards regional socio-economic transformation, trade and commerce integration, mobilization of investment and last but not the least, boost to exports. Greater economic stabilization and stimulation is the way forward because an ongoing human saga in the shape of a series of Coronas (Delta and Omicron) has badly damaged the global economy. Thus the role of China is paramount in which its mega projects like BRI, CPEC and free trade agreements RCEP would play a vital role for regional as well as international economic recovery.

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Source: Published in Pak Observer

Indo-US Strategic Partnership By Huma Baqai

INDIA and the US perceive each other differently in different geographies, however the strategic convergence between the two has grown steadily in the last two decades.

It's an Atlantic-style relationship but has strong Asian tones to it. China is interestingly shaping both US and Indian foreign policies. The phenomenal economic growth of China and its muscular assertion now and then has created security dilemmas for both.

The Indo-US strategic convergence is seen with some skepticism in Pakistan, largely because it may impact the strategic stability of the region and induce elements of asymmetry.

The US and India are in strategic and political partnership since the 2000s. Both have made sure that the world acknowledges this status.

They have tried to define and describe both regional as well as international peace and priorities as per their norms and terms. Their bilateral ties have also defined their relations with other states in the regional and global arenas.

“India and the US are not just strategic partners to contain China but in the American reckoning, India has become a ‘net security provider’ for the US in the entire Asia Pacific”- Zamir Akram. Post Pak-India independence and until the end of the Cold War, the Indo-US relations were overshadowed by Cold War politics.

The ‘Indo-Soviet friendship’ and the ‘US-Pak alliance’ were the defining features of South Asian and global politics. With Pakistan joining the US-led Western Bloc in 1954 and India’s policy of non-alignment; American and Indian relations became further estranged.

In 1959 President Eisenhower was the first serving U.S. President to visit India. However, it was during John F. Kennedy’s Presidency (1961–63) that the US first

started to view India as a strategic partner and a counterweight to the rise of Communist China.

When war broke out between India and China in 1962 over a disputed frontier, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to President Kennedy requesting support from the United States.

Washington extended support to Delhi, recognized the McMahon line as the border and provided India with air assistance and arms. Following the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, his successor Lyndon Johnson also sought to maintain good relations with India for countering Communist China.

Even during the 1965 Indo-Pak War, both strategic and military ties between Washington and Delhi remained close. In 1974 India completed its First Nuclear Test and this move contributed to a short period of estrangement between the United States and India, which was hugely compensated later.

The Indian government in May of 1998 announced the completion of a series of underground nuclear tests; these tests drew international condemnation and also negatively impacted India's relationship with the US. President Bill Clinton recalled the U.S. Ambassador to India and imposed economic sanctions.

The 1990s saw a turn in Indo-US relations. The Cold War had ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

This led to a rethink in India: from a foreign policy defined by suspicion of America it was now beginning to be defined by shared interests and mutual affection. The US-Pak relations nose dived post the fragmentation of the USSR.

The US from now on was accepting of the Indian nuclear program but had a strong bias towards Pakistan's nuclear program and this further brought the US and India closer together. The Pressler Amendment banned most economic and military assistance to Pakistan.

President George W. Bush's administration in 2001 lifted all U.S. sanctions on India after its 1998 nuclear test.

This is also the time when the United States actively sought to de-hyphenate India from Pakistan and to hyphenate Pakistan with Afghanistan in an effort to build better ties with New Delhi and realign its relationship with both the two protagonists of the region. The term Af-Pak appeared within U.S. foreign policy circles to designate Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single theatre of operations; the term was never acceptable to Pakistan.

Post 9/11, counter-terrorism also became a key area of cooperation between the two. However, the milestone in the relationship was reached with the signing of The Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) in 2004, The Civil Nuclear Deal in 2005, The Defence Cooperation Framework Agreement in 2005, Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) in 2012 and Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region in 2015.

The Obama Administration referred to US-Indo relations as one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century, the partnership that will be vital for the US strategic interests in Asia-Pacific and in the world. President Donald Trump in 2020 elevated the status of the relationship to that of a “comprehensive global strategic partnership”.

Biden has said that the Indo-U.S. relations are “destined to be stronger, closer and tighter,” to the benefit of the whole world. There is an element of continuity and bipartisan consensus on US relations with India.

The key feature of the US Indo-Pacific strategy is to build the economic, defence and military muscle of India so that it could effectively act as a counterbalance to China.

Under Modi’s government, the relationship became more robust. Both countries solidified their relationship at an unprecedented scale and pace despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United States has been advocating for India’s Nuclear Supplier Group membership for the last decade.

Since India and the United States had signed the civil nuclear deal in 2008, all three successive Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump had voiced their support for India’s NSG membership.

The US went out of its way to support India by challenging the factors that must be 'taken into account' and argued that these factors are not 'legally binding', hence the NSG can allow India to become a member of the Group.

Senior Pakistani Foreign Ministry officials have criticized the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for differently treating Pakistani and Indian applications for membership and have also regretted that the multilateral export control regime is highly politicized.

The US strategic aims in Asia to counter China are fixated on making India a regional power. US wants India to act on behalf of the US to curtail China's influence in South Asia and Asia as a whole.

United States' obvious leanings towards India to counterbalance China in the region have direct ramifications for Pakistan, thus disturbing the strategic stability in South Asia's convergence with India is also a huge compromise on what US stands for in terms of human rights be it Kashmir or minority rights.

US cannot play the blame game with China and completely ignore what is happening in the India-occupied Kashmir, with Muslims and other minorities in India. Economic relations between India and US have improved despite some initial irritants.

India and the U.S. have the potential to be each other's largest trade and investment partners, with significant benefits for both economies and peoples. In May 2021 India's total trade with the United States was \$9.18 billion; India ranked No. 10 among U.S. trade partners in 2021.

Even as the pandemic has taken its toll on trade, the United States remains India's biggest trading partner and largest export market. India was also given the Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1) status in 2018.

The STA-1 status had previously been specifically reserved for signatories of the export control regimes and had not even been extended to close US ally Israel. This status makes India the only nuclear nation to possess it and signals New Delhi's entry into the inner circle of America's closest partners.

The US-Indian relationship remains essentially strong insofar, however fault lines exist. Overall, it seems that there would be no fundamental change in the Indo-US relations and under the Biden Administration.

Moreover, there are positive indications that the relationship between the two may deepen in the coming years as both need each other in the current shifting global security environment.

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Source: Published in Pakobserver

A Three-Way Struggle For Global Dominance By Shahid Javed Burki

The world is about to see another cold war being fought. This one will be different from the one that was waged from 1945 when Germany was defeated by the United States, the Soviet Union, and Western Europe, to 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed and Communism as an ideology of governance died. In this period of 46 years, two global powers fought “coldly” to gain the support of the rest of the world. The struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union took the form of alliance formation with each superpower attempting to persuade the rest of the world that it was following a more efficient and effective way of governance. They were pursuing ideologies that differed in the role that was assigned to the state.

The Soviet state was all powerful. It owned practically all economic assets in the country and distributed the incomes that flowed from them in any way it wished. Many in what came to be known as the Third World — the superpowers were the two other worlds — believed that the Soviet system better suited their circumstances. The United States, on the other hand, believed in individual rights. The state could regulate the economic system but only lightly while properties were owned and managed by individuals. Incomes that came from the ownership of economic assets went to individual owners who paid a little bit to the state to develop and manage what were called “public goods”. Defence as well as building and maintaining communication and physical infrastructure were the responsibilities of the state and were financed by taxes paid by individuals.

The Soviet leadership had convinced many in the Third World that its system had produced higher and more equitable rates of economic growth compared to what was on offer from the United States’ system of capitalism. Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, was one of the leaders impressed by the Soviet system. He built a powerful Indian state, not by nationalising private assets but by having the state invest in heavy industries. Pakistan landed on the other side of the Cold War divide. It opted to join the alliances Washington had built to contain the spread of Communism in Asia. Under General Ayub Khan, Pakistan’s first military leader, Pakistan became a member of the Central Treaty Organization, the Cento, and of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, the Seato. In fact, it provided the link between the two defence treaties. About the time of Nehru’s death in 1964,

Alexander Gerschenkron, an American economist of Russian origin, established that the Soviet system of estimating the size and growth in national product had built-in upward biases. Correcting those, he showed that the Soviet Union had a smaller economy which had grown at a much slower rate of growth than claimed by Moscow.

However, it was not its claim about economic performance that resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 but its effort to expand its control over some of the countries that were on its border or near the border. It first encouraged the Communist Party of Afghanistan to capture the state and when that did not quite work out, it sent in its troops to install the government it wanted in place in Kabul. The Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in 1979 and stayed in the country for ten years, fighting the highly motivated groups of Afghan mujahedeen who had been armed by the United States and Pakistan. Moscow, admitting defeat, withdrew its forces from Afghanistan. Admission of failure weakened the Communist state and the Soviet Union collapsed. Moscow was back being the capital of Russia rather than the headquarter of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR. This event was celebrated by Francis Fukuyama, and American political scientist, who called it the end of history and wrote a bestselling book that carried that title.

In fact, history had not ended but was repeating itself. Great power competition for global dominance was back — this time the USSR being replaced by China as the US competitor. The Chinese economy grew rapidly, expanding manifold from 1980 to 2010 when the then Supreme Leader Deng Xiaoping opened the country to the world outside. The result was a dramatic increase in Chinese exports to the West which contributed to a sharp increase in the rate of economic growth. Before the end of the 20th century, China had overtaken Japan to become the world's second largest economy after the United States. It is widely accepted that with a decade or so, China will overtake the US and become the world's largest economy. These growth numbers are not fake as they were when the USSR claimed to be seeing high rates of growth. The size of the Chinese economy and its rate of growth were estimated by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The growth in the Chinese economy was translated by Beijing into growth in the country's military prowess. This worried the Americans whose two recent presidents, first Donald Trump and now Joe Biden, have decided to challenge China as a part of state policy. A new "cold war" has been launched and once again India and Pakistan have opted for the opposite sides. Washington has recruited New Delhi as a member of what Shinzo Abe, a former Japanese prime

minister, had labelled the “quad” — an alliance among four Pacific powers viz, Australia, India, Japan and the United States. The quad is a part of Washington’s Indo-Pacific Alliance and is meant to contain the increasing influence of China in Asia. Beijing is using its enormous and growing wealth to improve connectivity with the world to its west. To achieve that goal, it has launched what its powerful President, Xi Jinping, calls the Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI. Although not fully defined, the BRI would cost Beijing more than a trillion dollars. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the CPEC, is an important component of the BRI.

Watching these developments with considerable concern, ambitious Russian President, Vladimir Putin, who — not unlike China’s Xi — has amended the constitution to give himself a long tenure in office. He has begun to flex his muscles. The American pullout from Afghanistan has given him the opportunity to fulfil his expansionist ambitions. He is secret of his unhappiness at the breakup of the USSR and the resulting shrinking of the territory over which Moscow had control. The return of Russia as an expansionary force has brought another participant in the new Cold War. A three-part conflict involving the United States, China and Russia would be complicated development for the world to manage. While Washington has entered into active negotiations with Moscow, this is not being done with Beijing. The reason could be that President Putin has begun to aggressively mass his troops on his country’s border with Ukraine, sent his forces into Kazakhstan to deal with mass demonstrations in that country, and carried out military exercises near the border with Afghanistan. China has not shown any visibly aggressive intent.

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The Overstretched Superpower (Does America Have More Rivals Than It Can Handle?) By Hal Brands

The first year of Joe Biden's presidency ended as it began, with the United States facing crises on multiple fronts. In the spring of 2021, there were simultaneous war scares in eastern Europe and the western Pacific, thanks to a Chinese intimidation campaign against Taiwan and a Russian military buildup on the Ukrainian border. At the start of 2022, the world was no calmer. China's menacing maneuvers near Taiwan continued. Russian President Vladimir Putin, having mobilized an even bigger force near Ukraine, was threatening to start Europe's largest war in decades. Meanwhile, Tehran and Washington looked to be headed for a renewed crisis over Iran's nuclear program and its drive for regional primacy. Being a global superpower means never having the luxury of concentrating on just one thing.

That is a rude lesson for Biden, who took office hoping to reduce tensions in areas of secondary importance so that the United States could focus squarely on the problem that matters most: China. It also indicates a larger weakness in Washington's global posture, one that Biden now owns but did not create.

The United States is an overstretched hegemon, with a defense strategy that has come out of balance with the foreign policy it supports. Biden's first year has already shown how hard it is to manage an unruly world when Washington has more responsibilities—and more enemies—than it has coercive means. Over the longer term, a superpower that fails to keep its commitments in line with its capabilities may pay an even heavier price

ASIA FIRST

Biden's initial theory of foreign policy was straightforward: don't let smaller challenges distract from the big one. Of all the threats Washington faces, Biden's interim national security strategy argued, China "is the only competitor" able to "mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system." That challenge has become greater as China has accelerated its efforts to overturn the balance of power in Asia. When Biden took office, U.S. military leaders publicly

warned that Beijing could invade Taiwan by 2027. Biden was not naive enough to think that other problems would simply vanish. With trouble brewing on this central front, however, he did seek a measure of calm on others.

Biden avoided another doomed “reset” with Russia, but held an early summit with Putin in a bid to establish a “stable and predictable” relationship. He also sought to find a path back to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, thereby reducing the growing risk of confrontation in the Middle East. Finally, Biden ended the U.S. war in Afghanistan, a decision he justified by arguing that it was time to refocus attention and resources on the Indo-Pacific. Relations with U.S. allies followed the same pattern: the administration dropped U.S. opposition to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline linking Russia and western Europe, wagering that ending a contentious dispute with Germany would make it easier to win Berlin’s cooperation vis-à-vis Beijing.

Biden’s emerging defense strategy has a similar thrust. The Trump administration made a major shift in U.S. defense planning, arguing that the Pentagon must relentlessly prepare for a conflict against a great-power challenge—particularly from China—even though that meant accepting greater risk in other regions. Biden’s Pentagon likewise spent 2021 focusing on how to deter or defeat Chinese aggression, withdrawing scarce assets such as missile defense batteries from the Middle East, and making longer-term budgetary investments meant to “prioritize China and its military modernization as our pacing challenge.”

TROUBLE EVERYWHERE

Biden is undoubtedly right that the Chinese challenge overshadows all others, despite unresolved debates in Washington over exactly when that challenge will become most severe. His administration has made major moves in the Sino-American competition during its first year—expanding multilateral military planning and exercises in the western Pacific, focusing bodies such as NATO and the G-7 on Beijing’s belligerence, and launching the AUKUS partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom. Yet Biden hasn’t enjoyed anything resembling a respite on other fronts.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan precipitated the collapse of the government there, generating a near-term crisis that consumed Washington’s attention and leaving longer-term legacies—strategic and humanitarian—that are likely to do the same. Meanwhile, a brutal internal conflict in Ethiopia destabilized one of Africa’s

most important countries. Most problematic of all, U.S. relations with Iran and Russia became worse, not better.

The United States is an overstretched hegemon, with a defense strategy out of balance with the foreign policy it supports.

Iran has taken a hard-line stance in negotiations on a revived nuclear deal while steadily decreasing the amount of time it would need to produce a potential weapon. Tehran's proxies have also conducted periodic attacks against U.S. personnel and partners in the Middle East as part of an ongoing effort to force an American withdrawal from the region.

Putin, for his part, has authorized or at least permitted significant cyberattacks against critical infrastructure in the United States. He threatened war against Ukraine in the spring and has now mobilized forces for what U.S. officials fear could be a major invasion and prolonged occupation of that country. To preserve the peace, Moscow has demanded an acknowledged Russian sphere of influence and the rollback of NATO's military presence in eastern Europe. What exactly Putin has in mind for Ukraine is uncertain, but "stable and predictable" is clearly not how he envisions his relationship with the United States.

These are ominous signs for 2022. The United States could find itself facing grave security crises in Europe and the Middle East in addition to persistent and elevated tensions in the Pacific. And these possibilities hint at a deeper problem in U.S. statecraft, one that has been accumulating for years: strategic overstretch.

MORE WITH LESS

Facing trouble on many fronts is business as usual for a global power. U.S. foreign policy—and the defense strategy that buttresses it—has long been designed with that problem in mind. After the Cold War, the United States adopted a "two major regional contingencies" approach to defense planning. In essence, it committed to maintaining a military large and capable enough to fight two serious wars in separate regions at roughly the same time. U.S. planners were under no illusion that Washington could fully indemnify itself against all the threats it faced if they happened to manifest simultaneously. Their aim was to limit the risk inherent in a global foreign policy by ensuring that an enemy in one theater could not wage a successful war of aggression while the Pentagon was busy with a crisis in another. Just as the United Kingdom, the superpower of its day, had a two-power naval

standard in the nineteenth century, a unipolar United States had a two-war standard for a generation after 1991.

Over time, however, the two-war standard became impossible to sustain. The defense spending cuts associated with the Budget Control Act of 2011 (later compounded by the sequestration cuts of 2013) forced the Pentagon to adopt a somewhat stingier “one-plus” war standard aimed at defeating one capable aggressor and stalemating or “imposing unacceptable costs” on another. Meanwhile, the number of threats was increasing. During the post-Cold War era, the Pentagon worried mostly about potential conflicts in the Persian Gulf and the Korean Peninsula. But the events of 2014 and 2015—the Islamic State’s rampage through Iraq and Syria, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and China’s drive for dominance in the South China Sea, along with ongoing operations in Afghanistan—showed that U.S. allies and interests were now imperiled in several regions at once.

Leaders in Moscow and Tehran see that the United States is stretched thin and eager to pay more attention to China.

Washington’s enemies were also growing more formidable. The two-war standard was primarily focused on rogue states with second-class militaries. Now, the United States had to contend with two near-peer competitors, China and Russia, that boasted world-class conventional capabilities alongside the advantages that would come from fighting on their own geopolitical doorsteps. By the end of Barack Obama’s presidency, it was an open question whether the United States could defeat China if Beijing assaulted Taiwan, or Russia if Moscow invaded the Baltic region. What was clear was that any such war would require the overwhelming majority of the Pentagon’s combat power, along with virtually all of its airlift and sealift capabilities.

This realization prompted a major change in U.S. defense planning. The Trump administration’s defense strategy declared that the two-war standard was history. The U.S. military would henceforth be sized and shaped to win one major war against a great-power competitor. The United States would still be capable of “deterring” aggression in other theaters, but, as a bipartisan commission that included several current Biden administration officials pointed out, how exactly the Pentagon would do so without the capability to defeat such aggression remained ambiguous.

Shifting to a one-war standard was a sensible way to motivate the lethargic Pentagon bureaucracy to find creative solutions to the urgent, daunting challenge of war with a near-peer rival. It involved a sober recognition that losing a great-power war could inflict a death blow on the U.S.-led international order. Yet the 2018 defense strategy was also an acknowledgment of overstretch: the United States could focus on its primary challenge only by reducing its ability to focus on others. This limitation is the root of the problem Biden has inherited, and it has some dangerous implications.

THE CREDIBILITY GAP

The most glaring danger, highlighted by the concurrent crises in eastern Europe and East Asia, is that the United States could have to fight wars against China and Russia simultaneously. This would indeed be a nightmare scenario for a one-war military. But it wouldn't take a global security meltdown to reveal the problems caused by Washington's predicament.

First, overstretch limits U.S. options in a crisis. Where the United States should draw the line against Russian aggression in eastern Europe, how hard it should push back against Tehran's provocations in the Middle East, and whether it should use force to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear threshold state are matters that reasonable people can debate. But the fact that the United States increasingly has a China centric defense strategy has a constraining effect in other theaters. If a U.S. president knows that the Pentagon will need everything it has for an all-too-plausible war with China, he or she will be less inclined to use force against Iran or Russia, lest Washington be caught short if violence erupts in the Pacific.

This issue leads to a second problem: the loss of diplomatic influence in situations short of war. Since the Taiwan and Ukraine crises of early 2021, some observers have speculated that Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping are coordinating their coercion as a way of threatening Washington with a two-front war. The reality is that explicit coordination is hardly necessary to profit from U.S. overextension.

Historically, overstretched superpowers have eventually faced hard choices. Leaders in Moscow and Tehran can see that the United States is stretched thin militarily and eager to pay more attention to China. This gives them an incentive to push Washington harder in hopes of achieving gains at the expense of a distracted superpower. As the Russia expert Michael Kofman has written, Putin's strategy of

using military coercion to revise the post-Cold War order in Europe is premised on his belief that the “greater threat from China” will eventually “force Washington to compromise and renegotiate.” The more intense its focus on China, the higher the price the United States may be willing to pay for restraint in other places.

The perils of overstretch, however, are not confined to secondary theaters. Weakness at the periphery can ultimately cause weakness at the center. A decade ago, the United States withdrew its forces from Iraq to economize in the Middle East and pivot toward the Pacific. Iraq’s subsequent collapse forced Washington to reengage there, fighting a multi-year conflict that devoured resources and attention.

Similarly, if the United States finds itself in a showdown with Iran or if Russia attempts to revise the status quo in eastern Europe, Washington may once again find itself pivoting away from the Pacific to reinforce under-resourced regions that still matter to U.S. security. America’s defense strategy is increasingly focused on the Indo-Pacific, but its foreign policy remains stubbornly global. That’s a recipe for trouble all around.

TOUGH CHOICES

To be clear, military power is hardly the only thing that matters in global affairs. But it is a necessary component of an effective foreign policy, if only because force remains the ultimate arbiter of international disputes. Xi, Putin, and other U.S. adversaries are unlikely to be swayed by Biden’s “relentless diplomacy” unless they are also awed by the military power that backs it up.

Historically, overstretched superpowers have eventually faced hard choices about how to address mismatches between commitments and capabilities. When the United Kingdom found itself with more rivals than it could handle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it began appeasing those that were less dangerous and proximate—including the United States—to concentrate on containing Germany. When the Korean War revealed that Washington’s containment policy outstripped its military resources, the United States was forced to undertake a significant defense buildup to close the gap.

The Biden administration may try to skirt this dilemma by managing tensions with Iran, Russia, and other challengers while encouraging allies in Europe and partners in the Middle East to take greater responsibility for their own defense.

That's an understandable instinct. In the near term, both the geopolitical costs of true retrenchment and the financial costs of rearmament may seem to exceed the difficulties of muddling along. Yet Biden's first year has already shown that overstretch inflicts damage on the installment plan. Eventually, the world will punish a superpower that allows its strategic deficit to grow too big for too long.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

Rebuilding The World Order – Analysis By

Emil Avdaliani

Many in the West believe China's economic ascendancy indicates that Beijing is covertly working to usher in a new world order in which the balance of power has shifted.

History shows that changes in the world order are inevitable, but they are not happening as quickly as some analysts think. For example, the rise of the US to the world's primary geopolitical position took nearly half a century, from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. France's rise to domination over western Europe in the 17th century was also a long and arduous process.

In these as well as many other cases from ancient and medieval times, the rise of a new power was facilitated by stagnation, gradual decline, and military confrontation among the various existing powers.

For instance, the US was already powerful in the early 20th century, but it was the infighting during the two world wars among the European powers that brought down the edifice of the Europe-led world order and opened a path for American ascendancy.

But while it is possible to identify the changing winds of the world order through various analytical methods, it is much harder to find ways to preserve an existing order. It requires a whole constellation of leaders from competing sides to grasp the severity of the threat posed by radical change and to pursue measures together to cool down tensions.

The key question that needs to be addressed is whether the West still possesses the necessary political, economic, and military tools to uphold the existing world order and not allow it to slip into chaos, as the world's leaders mistakenly did in the first half of the 20th century.

The successful preservation of an existing world order is a rare event in history. Following the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, European leaders gathered to build a long-lasting peace. They saw that the French power, though soundly defeated

under Napoleon I, needed to be accommodated within the new fabric of the European geopolitical order. This meant not only inviting French representatives to conferences, but offering military and economic cooperation as well as concessions to the French to limit their political grievances.

In other words, European diplomats had an acute understanding of post-French Revolution geopolitics and understood the need to build a long-lasting security architecture through balance of power.

But such approaches are unusual. Perhaps the shock of the bloody Napoleonic Wars, as well as the presence of such brilliant diplomats such as Metternich, Talleyrand, Castlereagh, and Alexander I, assured the success of the new order.

It is far more common that challenges to the world order lead to direct military confrontation. Failure to accommodate Germany in the early 20th century led in part to WWI, and the errant diplomacy of the Treaty of Versailles led in part to WWII. The list goes on.

China's rise to power is another case for study. The country is poised to become a powerful player in international politics thanks to its economic rise and concurrent military development. Beijing has strategic imperatives that clash with those of the US. It needs to secure procurement of oil and gas resources, which are currently most readily available through the Strait of Malacca. In an age of US naval dominance, the Chinese imperative is to redirect its economy's dependence, as well as its supply routes, elsewhere.

That is the central motivation behind the almost trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, which is intended to reconnect the Asia-Pacific with Europe through Russia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. At the same time, Beijing has a growing ambition to thwart US naval dominance off Chinese shores.

In view of these factors, mutual suspicion between Beijing and Washington is bound to increase over the next years and decades.

Thus, we find ourselves within a changing world order. What is interesting is what the US (or the West collectively) can do to salvage the existing order.

From the US side, a strengthening of existing US-led alliance systems with Middle Eastern and Asia-Pacific states could help to retain American influence in Eurasia. Specifically, it would enable the US to limit Russia's, Iran's, and possibly China's actions in their respective neighborhoods.

Another powerful measure to solidify the existing world order would be to increase Washington's economic footprint across Eurasia. This could be similar to the Marshall Plan, with which the US saved Europe economically and attached it to the US economy. New economic measures could be even more efficient and long-lasting in terms of strengthening Western influence across Eurasia.

But no matter what economic and military moves the US makes with regard to allies such as South Korea, Japan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and others, any attempt to uphold the existing world order without China's cooperation would be short-lived and would echo the way Germany was cast out of the Versailles negotiations, which served only to create a grievance in Berlin and prompt clandestine preparations for a new conflict. In a way, the West's current problems with Russia can also be explained this way: Moscow was cast out of the post-Cold War order, which caused worry and a degree of revanchism among the Russian elites.

Without China's inclusion in the world order, no feasible security conditions can be laid out. To be preserved, the world order must be adjusted to rising challenges and new opportunities. Many Western diplomats are uncomfortable dealing with China, but casting Beijing in the role of direct competitor would not solve the problem, nor would giving it large concessions, which would be too risky.

What is required is a middle road, a means of allowing China to participate in an adjusted world order in which some of its interests are secured. Only that will increase the chances for long-lasting security in Eurasia.

Pulling this off will require an incredible effort from Western and Chinese diplomats. It remains to be seen whether they will be more successful than their predecessors were in the early 20th century and other periods of history.

Source: Published in Euro Asia Review

Role of Nuclear Power in Climate Change

Mitigation By Hafiz Abdul Nasir

THE effects of environmental and climate change are turning out to be progressively dangerous, what was a “what if scenario” has now become our everyday reality.

Climate and environment related risks and dangers – including extraordinary climatic events, water scarcity and the inability to adjust and relieve environmental change – are among the top dangers that the world faces.

An abundance of carbon dioxide (CO₂), along with other ozone depleting substances in the atmosphere, due to ever-increasing consumption of hydrocarbons continues to exacerbate the issue. Policymakers, scientists and people in general, progressively perceive the need to address environmentally-related challenges through activism, participation, discourse and pragmatic measures.

Global warming is the fundamental driver of climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is endeavouring hard to prevent the rise in average global temperature beyond 2°C above pre-industrial level to forestall unmanageable effects on the climate.

Although, Pakistan is not amongst the major contributors of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, yet Pakistan is one of the most at risk and vulnerable country due to climate change. Pakistan stood fifth on the list of most vulnerable countries as per Climate Risk Index (CRI) 1999-2018.

Pakistan is an agriculture-based country and according to Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21, agriculture sector contributes 19.2% to the GDP and provides employment to around 38.5% of the labour force. Special emphasis is being given by the current Government of Pakistan to reduce global warming through the Prime Minister’s Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme.

Similarly, the government also introduced the country’s first-ever Pakistan Electric Vehicles Policy 2020-2025, which envisaged targeting a robust electric vehicle

market having a 30% and 90% share in passenger vehicles and heavy duty trucks by 2030 and 2040 respectively.

This would not only reduce a heavy annual oil import bill of about \$13 billion but would also prevent environmental degradation.

The world is changing rapidly, our dependence on energy, both for human wellbeing and society's continued development, has increased manifold.

Since energy sector of Pakistan is the leading contributor towards GHG emissions, as thermal generation has the largest share in electricity production. According to Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21, thermal power's share in 2021 (July-April) has increased to 59.4% as compared to 58.4% in 2020 (July-April).

Therefore, it is imperative to consider alternative/carbon-free means of power generation. After thermal, hydel has the largest share in electricity generation and its share has declined to 30.5% in 2021 (July-April) as compared to 30.9% in 2020 (July-April).

Furthermore, due to increasing demand of energy we cannot count on hydel, as a major contributor of power generation, in the long run as water resources are depleting ever fast around the globe in general and Pakistan in particular. Whereas, nuclear and renewable have just 7.8% and 2.23% shares respectively in electricity generation.

National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) has prepared the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) 2018-40.

This plan is a component of the Integrated Energy Plan, which will incorporate power, as well as demand and supply plans of petroleum until 2047. Such pragmatic policy instruments are historic accomplishments for the whole power sector of Pakistan.

The IGCEP participates conversion of electricity generation sector from thermal to renewables and nuclear power. Renewables like wind and solar still depend on the whims of weather and their adoption is still in the earliest stages. There is no alternative available in terms of reliable, economical and carbon-free replacement of nuclear energy.

There are certain myths that exist about nuclear energy. Critics of nuclear energy point towards incidents such as Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima, whereas ignoring how these incidents have led towards better safety mechanisms and protocols to reduce risk of future incidents.

Plane crashes have not stopped us from flying, because people recognize it as an effective and safe mean of travelling. We use radiation in nuclear medication techniques to treat cancer. We lie in the daylight trusting that the radiation of sun will make us healthier. Radiation can be horrendous and risky if not utilized wisely, yet it can be used to our advantage.

We need to arrive at a similar acceptance of nuclear power. Today all new nuclear power plants are thoroughly tested by independent actors and must pass design approvals by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Pakistan has vast experience of operating nuclear power plants as the country's first nuclear power plant, Karachi Nuclear power Plant (KANUPP), became operational in 1972.

This plant, a variant of the CANDU reactor built by Canadian General Electric Company, had a capacity of 137 MW and operated safely for five decades. Four nuclear power plants – Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit-1 (C-1), Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit-2 (C-2), Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit-3 (C-3) and Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit-4 (C-4), generating 1300MW energy in total – are being operated at Chashma.

There are two more power plants namely Karachi Nuclear power Plant Unit-2 (K-2) and Karachi Nuclear power Plant Unit-3 (K-3) having generation capacity of 1100 MW each, recently installed in Karachi with the assistance of China.

According to IAEA, nuclear power produced about 10% of the world's electricity in 2018. In 2020, 13 European Union (EU) Member States with nuclear electricity production generated 683,512 GWh of nuclear electricity.

This accounts for almost 25% of the EU's total electricity production. So, we cannot achieve the objectives of Paris Accord to reduce global GHG emissions, without shifting to nuclear power.

For a country like Pakistan, nuclear power has multiple benefits: it would prevent further environmental degradation, would reduce import bill of hydrocarbon and help to sort balance of payment, would provide reliable and uninterrupted power supply, would reduce cost of electricity and resultantly allow the manufacture of cheaper and market-competitive goods.

Moreover, by-products of nuclear technology are utilized for nuclear medicine, radiotherapy, fermentation of eatables, agriculture and biotechnology, besides it also provides the opportunity to produce skilled workforce and sustainable employment.

—The writer is an IT professional with a keen interest in issues of science and technology.

Source: Published in pak observer

Biden's Focus Will Soon Fall Firmly On

Foreign Policy – OpEd By Andrew

Hammond

One of soccer's biggest cliches is that it is a "game of two halves." This sporting platitude also provides a good characterization of the first year of Joe Biden's presidency.

Biden had a significantly stronger-than-expected first half of the year, fueled in part by wide-ranging relief that Donald Trump had finally left office after the Capitol Hill riot debacle. However, this early belle epoque was followed by the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, which punctured the aura of competence and stability that Biden had cultivated on the 2020 campaign trail and in his first few months in office.

While many in the US were lukewarm, or opposed to, the country's continued commitment to Afghanistan, key mistakes were made in the botched withdrawal that have led to searching questions being asked about US military power. While claims made at the time about the end of the "American era" of leadership were off the mark, US soft power and moral credibility have taken a hit with allies from Asia-Pacific to the Americas. This is troublesome for Biden as he seeks to rebuild the country's global reputation after the travails of the Trump era.

In the period since the summer, Biden's various challenges have sometimes obscured the fact that he had such significant political momentum from January to June, with a laser-like focus on domestic policy. This included progress with a huge \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill, plus early successes combating the pandemic, which drew favorable comparisons with the dynamic early presidencies of Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.

At the time, Biden made the correct call that he needed his overwhelming priority to be domestic policy in 2021 and 2022, as the window of opportunity to secure his agenda at home may only last until November this year. This is because the likelihood is growing that he could face hostile Republican majorities from 2023 in

both the Senate and the House of Representatives, should the Democrats lose a significant number of seats in the upcoming midterm elections.

In the House, there have been only three midterm elections since 1900 — those in 1934, 1998 and 2002 — in which the incumbent president's party didn't lose seats. In the postwar era, there has been an average net loss of 26 House seats, and losses were particularly striking for the last two Democratic presidents: Bill Clinton in 1994 and Barack Obama in 2010.

While Biden was always likely to face tough 2022 elections, this scenario has been made even harder by the puncturing of his presidency since last summer and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Prior to August, the date of the final US troop withdrawal, Biden's approval rating had exceeded his disapproval, but since then the situation has been reversed.

Today, Biden's disapproval rating is often at least 10 percentage points higher than his approval rate, driven by a heady political and economic cocktail of rising inflation and reemerging concern over the pandemic. One poll for CBS News and YouGov last Sunday, for instance, highlighted that nearly two-thirds of Americans believe the US is "doing badly" on managing the pandemic, with only 36 percent of respondents believing the government's efforts are "going well."

While Biden's presidency is therefore in trouble, he cannot be counted out for reelection if he chooses to run again, especially if the economy grows significantly in 2022, 2023 and 2024 and inflation falls back. That possibility is exemplified by the presidencies of Clinton and Obama, which were rejuvenated in the second half of their first terms.

Looking ahead, Biden is likely to focus more on foreign policy. To be sure, he does have other domestic ambitions, including his "Build Back Better" bill. However, his goal of bringing greater reconciliation to the US body politic after the polarization of Trump's presidency may be too big a stretch.

Biden is therefore set to increasingly turn to foreign policy — and this could happen sooner rather than later depending on what happens in Ukraine. Not only does Biden have a packed international agenda, he also has a deep interest in foreign affairs and wants this to be a key part of his legacy.

The president is far from alone among US presidents in wanting foreign initiatives to be a critical part of his legacy. For instance, Richard Nixon scored a string of international successes in his second two years of office, including his landmark trip to China in February 1972.

Taken together, this is why Biden is increasingly likely to turn to the world stage as his presidency advances. Not only is the steam likely to be lost from his domestic agenda, but there are also significant potential foreign prizes on the horizon that could yet be part of a successful reelection bid.

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Source: Published in Eur Asia Review

The Putin Doctrine By Angela Stent

The current crisis between Russia and Ukraine is a reckoning that has been 30 years in the making. It is about much more than Ukraine and its possible NATO membership. It is about the future of the European order crafted after the Soviet Union's collapse. During the 1990s, the United States and its allies designed a Euro-Atlantic security architecture in which Russia had no clear commitment or stake, and since Russian President Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia has been challenging that system. Putin has routinely complained that the global order ignores Russia's security concerns, and he has demanded that the West recognize Moscow's right to a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space. He has staged incursions into neighboring states, such as Georgia, that have moved out of Russia's orbit in order to prevent them from fully reorienting.

Putin has now taken this approach one step further. He is threatening a far more comprehensive invasion of Ukraine than the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in the Donbas that Russia carried out in 2014, an invasion that would undermine the current order and potentially reassert Russia's preeminence in what he insists is its "rightful" place on the European continent and in world affairs. He sees this as a good time to act. In his view, the United States is weak, divided, and less able to pursue a coherent foreign policy. His decades in office have made him more cynical about the United States' staying power. Putin is now dealing with his fifth U.S. president, and he has come to see Washington as an unreliable interlocutor. The new German government is still finding its political feet, Europe on the whole is focused on its domestic challenges, and the tight energy market gives Russia more leverage over the continent. The Kremlin believes that it can bank on Beijing's support, just as China supported Russia after the West tried to isolate it in 2014.

Putin may still decide not to invade. But whether he does or not, the Russian president's behavior is being driven by an interlocking set of foreign policy principles that suggest Moscow will be disruptive in the years to come. Call it "the Putin doctrine." The core element of this doctrine is getting the West to treat Russia as if it were the Soviet Union, a power to be respected and feared, with special rights in its neighborhood and a voice in every serious international matter. The doctrine holds that only a few states should have this kind of authority, along with complete sovereignty, and that others must bow to their wishes. It entails

defending incumbent authoritarian regimes and undermining democracies. And the doctrine is tied together by Putin's overarching aim: reversing the consequences of the Soviet collapse, splitting the transatlantic alliance, and renegotiating the geographic settlement that ended the Cold War.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Russia, according to Putin, has an absolute right to a seat at the table on all major international decisions. The West should recognize that Russia belongs to the global board of directors. After what Putin portrays as the humiliation of the 1990s, when a greatly weakened Russia was forced to accede to an agenda set by the United States and its European allies, he has largely achieved this goal. Even though Moscow was ejected from the G-8 after its annexation of Crimea, its veto on the United Nations Security Council and role as an energy, nuclear, and geographic superpower ensure that the rest of the world must take its views into account. Russia successfully rebuilt its military after the 2008 war with Georgia, and it is now the preeminent regional military power, with the capability to project power globally. Moscow's ability to threaten its neighbors enables it to force the West to the negotiating table, as has been so evident in the past few weeks.

As far as Putin is concerned, the use of force is perfectly appropriate if Russia believes that its security is threatened: Russia's interests are as legitimate as those of the West, and Putin asserts that the United States and Europe have been disregarding them. For the most part, the United States and Europe have rejected the Kremlin's narrative of grievance, which centers most notably on the breakup of the Soviet Union and especially the separation of Ukraine from Russia. When Putin described the Soviet collapse as a "great geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," he was lamenting the fact that 25 million Russians found themselves outside of Russia, and he particularly criticized the fact that 12 million Russians found themselves in the new Ukrainian state. As he wrote in a 5,000-word treatise published last summer and titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," in 1991, "people found themselves abroad overnight, taken away, this time indeed, from their historical motherland." His essay has recently been distributed to Russian troops.

In an essay last year, Putin wrote that Ukraine was being turned into "a springboard against Russia."

This narrative of loss to the West is tied in to a particular obsession of Putin's: the idea that NATO, not content to merely admit or aid post-Soviet states, might

threaten Russia itself. The Kremlin insists that this preoccupation is based on real concerns. Russia, after all, has been repeatedly invaded from the West. In the twentieth century, it was invaded by anti-Bolshevik allied forces, including some from the United States, during its civil war from 1917 to 1922. Germany invaded twice, leading to the loss of 26 million Soviet citizens in World War II. Putin has explicitly linked this history to Russia's current concerns about NATO infrastructure nearing Russia's borders and Moscow's resulting demands for security guarantees.

Today, however, Russia is a nuclear superpower brandishing new, hypersonic missiles. No country—least of all its smaller, weaker neighbors—has any intention of invading Russia. Indeed, the country's neighbors to its west have a different narrative and stress their vulnerability over the centuries to invasion from Russia. The United States would also never attack, although Putin has accused it of seeking to “cut a juicy piece of our pie.” Nevertheless, the historical self-perception of Russia's vulnerability resonates with the country's population. Government-controlled media are filled with claims that Ukraine could be a launching pad for NATO aggression. Indeed, in his essay last year, Putin wrote that Ukraine was being turned into “a springboard against Russia.”

Putin also believes that Russia has an absolute right to a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space. This means its former Soviet neighbors should not join any alliances that are deemed hostile to Moscow, particularly NATO or the European Union. Putin has made this demand clear in the two treaties proposed by the Kremlin on December 17, which require that Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries—as well as Sweden and Finland—commit to permanent neutrality and eschew seeking NATO membership. NATO would also have to retreat to its 1997 military posture, before its first enlargement, by removing all troops and equipment in central and eastern Europe. (This would reduce NATO's military presence to what it was when the Soviet Union disintegrated.) Russia would also have veto power over the foreign policy choices of its non-NATO neighbors. This would ensure that pro-Russian governments are in power in countries bordering Russia—including, foremost, Ukraine.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

So far, no Western government has been prepared to accept these extraordinary demands. The United States and Europe widely embrace the premise that nations are free to determine both their domestic systems and their foreign policy

affiliations. From 1945 to 1989, the Soviet Union denied self-determination to central and eastern Europe and exercised control over both the domestic and foreign policies of Warsaw Pact members through local communist parties, the secret police, and the Red Army. When a country strayed too far from the Soviet model—Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968—its leaders were ousted by force. The Warsaw Pact was an alliance that had a unique track record: it invaded only its own members.

The modern Kremlin's interpretation of sovereignty has notable parallels to that of the Soviet Union. It holds, to paraphrase George Orwell, that some states are more sovereign than others. Putin has said that only a few great powers—Russia, China, India, and the United States—enjoy absolute sovereignty, free to choose which alliances they join or reject. Smaller countries such as Ukraine or Georgia are not fully sovereign and must respect Russia's strictures, just as Central America and Latin America, according to Putin, must heed their large northern neighbor. Russia also does not seek allies in the Western sense of the word but instead looks for mutually beneficial instrumental and transactional partnerships with countries, such as China, that do not restrict Russia's freedom to act or pass judgment on its internal politics.

Such authoritarian partnerships are an element of the Putin doctrine. The president presents Russia as a supporter of the status quo, an advocate of conservative values, and an international player that respects established leaders, especially autocrats. As recent events in Belarus and Kazakhstan have shown, Russia is the go-to power to support embattled authoritarian rulers. It has defended autocrats both in its neighborhood and far beyond—including in Cuba, Libya, Syria, and Venezuela. The West, according to the Kremlin, instead supports chaos and regime change, as happened during the 2003 Iraq war and the Arab Spring in 2011.

The Warsaw Pact was an alliance that had a unique track record: it invaded only its own members.

But in its own "sphere of privileged interests," Russia can act as a revisionist power when it considers its interests threatened or when it wants to advance its interests, as the annexation of Crimea and the invasions of Georgia and Ukraine demonstrated. Russia's drive to be acknowledged as a leader and backer of strongmen regimes has been increasingly successful in recent years as Kremlin-

backed mercenary groups have acted on behalf of Russia in many parts of the world, as is the case in Ukraine.

Moscow's revisionist interference also isn't limited to what it considers its privileged domain. Putin believes Russia's interests are best served by a fractured transatlantic alliance. Accordingly, he has supported anti-American and Euroskeptic groups in Europe; backed populist movements of the left and right on both sides of the Atlantic; engaged in election interference; and generally worked to exacerbate discord within Western societies. One of his major goals is to get the United States to withdraw from Europe. U.S. President Donald Trump was contemptuous of the NATO alliance and dismissive of some of the United States' key European allies—notably then German Chancellor Angela Merkel—and spoke openly of pulling the United States out of the organization. The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has assiduously sought to repair the alliance, and indeed Putin's manufactured crisis over Ukraine has reinforced alliance unity. But there is enough doubt within Europe about the durability of U.S. commitment after 2024 that Russia has found some success reinforcing skepticism, particularly through social media.

Weakening the transatlantic alliance could pave the way for Putin to realize his ultimate aim: jettisoning the post-Cold War, liberal, rules-based international order promoted by Europe, Japan, and the United States in favor of one more amenable to Russia. For Moscow, this new system might resemble the nineteenth-century concert of powers. It could also turn into a new incarnation of the Yalta system, where Russia, the United States, and now China divide the world into tripolar spheres of influence. Moscow's growing rapprochement with Beijing has indeed reinforced Russia's call for a post-West order. Both Russia and China demand a new system in which they exercise more influence in a multipolar world.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century systems both recognized certain rules of the game. After all, during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union mostly respected each other's spheres of influence. The two most dangerous crises of that era—Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 Berlin ultimatum and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis—were defused before military conflict broke out. But if the present is any indication, it looks as if Putin's post-West "order" would be a disordered Hobbesian world with few rules of the game. In pursuit of his new system, Putin's modus operandi is to keep the West off balance, guessing about his true intentions, and then surprising it when he acts.

THE RUSSIAN RESET

Given Putin's ultimate goal, and given his belief that now is the time to force the West to respond to his ultimatums, can Russia be deterred from launching another military incursion into Ukraine? No one knows what Putin will ultimately decide. But his conviction that the West has ignored what he deems Russia's legitimate interests for three decades continues to drive his actions. He is determined to reassert Russia's right to limit the sovereign choices of its neighbors and its former Warsaw Pact allies and to force the West to accept these limits—be that by diplomacy or military force.

That doesn't mean the West is powerless. The United States should continue to pursue diplomacy with Russia and seek to craft a modus vivendi that is acceptable to both sides without compromising the sovereignty of its allies and partners. At the same time, it should keep coordinating with the Europeans to respond and impose costs on Russia. But it is clear that even if Europe avoids war, there is no going back to the situation as it was before Russia began massing its troops in March 2021. The ultimate result of this crisis could be the third reorganization of Euro-Atlantic security since the late 1940s. The first came with the consolidation of the Yalta system into two rival blocs in Europe after World War II. The second emerged from 1989 to 1991, with the collapse of the communist bloc and then the Soviet Union itself, followed by the West's subsequent drive to create a Europe "whole and free." Putin now directly challenges that order with his moves against Ukraine.

As the United States and its allies await Russia's next move and try to deter an invasion with diplomacy and the threat of heavy sanctions, they need to understand Putin's motives and what they portend. The current crisis is ultimately about Russia redrawing the post-Cold War map and seeking to reassert its influence over half of Europe, based on the claim that it is guaranteeing its own security. It may be possible to avert a military conflict this time. But as long as Putin remains in power, so will his doctrine.

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