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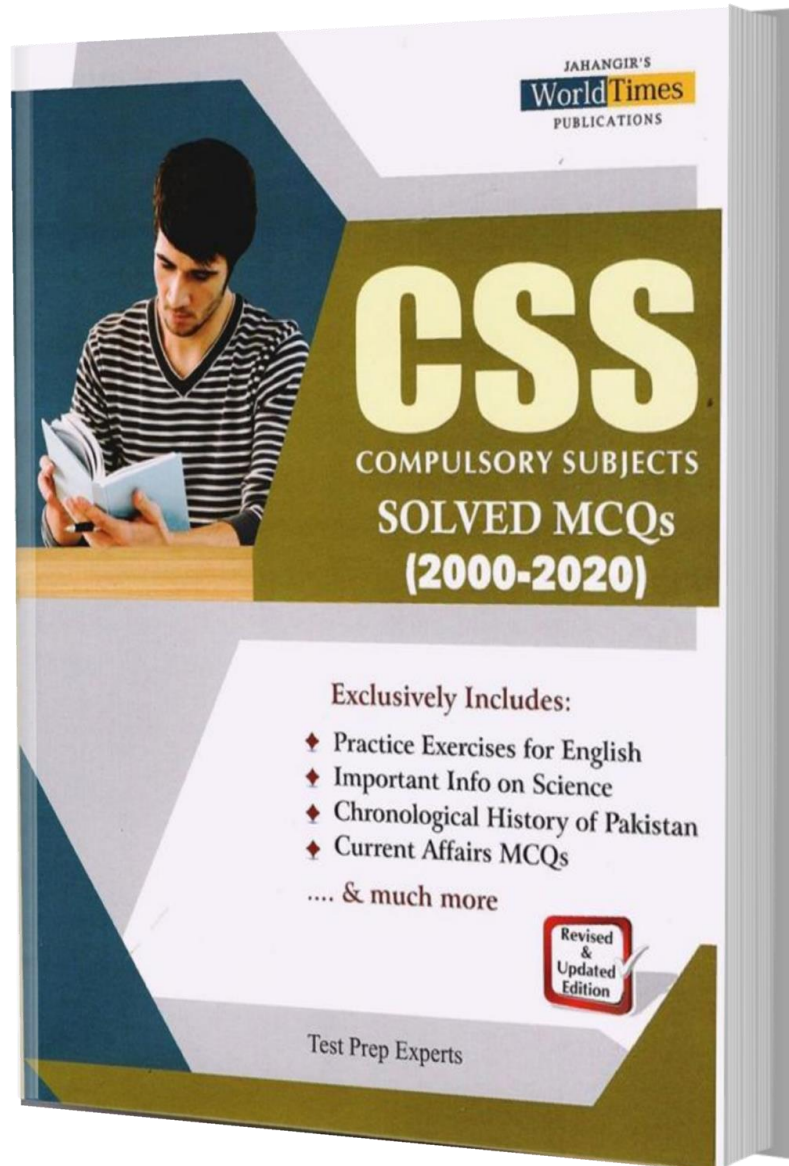
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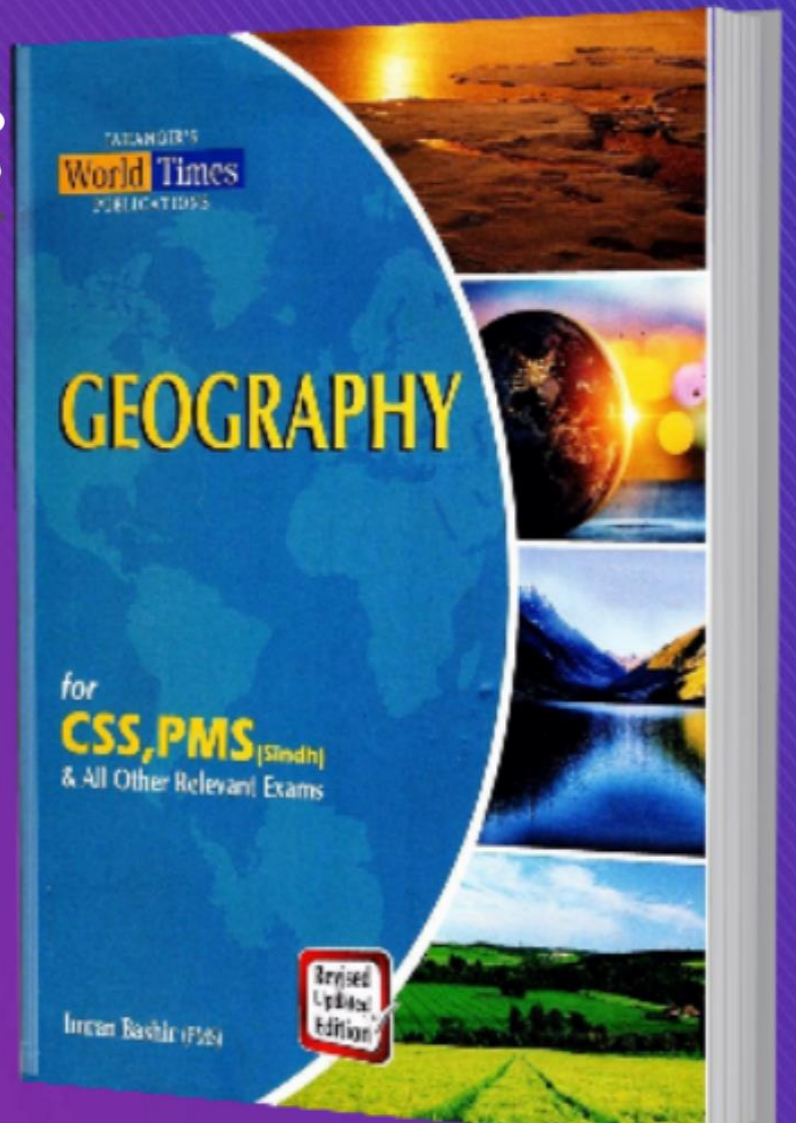


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PAKISTAN

Improving Ties | Editorial

Pakistan and China firmly believe that regionalism and working together is the way forward to prosperity and address security concerns. The two sides have already signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance defence ties. General Wei Fenghe, National Minister of National Defence of China, meeting with General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), suggests that the two sides value each other's strategic and military significance.

Perhaps, the most significant proof of China Pakistan's time-tested friendship is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of China's Belt One Road Initiative (BRI). The coordination between and cooperation of the two sides was evident during the 5th Meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Gwadar's development. While the two sides evaluated the projects' progress, they also vowed to connect Gwadar port to the second phase of Free Trade Zone (FTZ) through Eastbay Expressway by 2021's end.

Since operations at Gwadar port have already started, it is now time to ensure that the port city has a world-class inter and intra city communication network. Gwadar Port's connectivity with FTZ will bring many dividends for Beijing and Islamabad. But the biggest beneficiary will be the locals whose lives will change due to the socio-economic activity that will kick-start once the road projects complete. On the one hand, the road infrastructure from the port to the FTZ will accelerate business activity there; on the other, it will attract investors to the city.

While we have already entered the second phase, access to telecommunication is missing from the scene. The lack of telecommunication networks can emerge as a significant stumbling block in the overall development of Gwadar. Therefore, Pakistan must do all that it takes to provide telecommunication facilities there. After all, the development of Gwadar means progress for CPEC and the rest of the country. The greater common good demands from us to remain focused and continue working on Gwadar's development.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2020/improving-ties>

Foreign Policy Goals | Editorial

The meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is significant for Pakistan in a number of ways. Firstly, it is the first meeting of the SCO after the coronavirus pandemic shook the world. A meeting of world leaders, amidst sweeping new developments such as a new US President and several new global alliances, is bound to be impactful any way, most of all during a pandemic when these meetings have become rarer.

Secondly, as the region's geopolitics shift, Pakistan is increasingly becoming a player in new alliances being built. The SCO-CHG focuses primarily on economic and trade cooperation—there are many new developments and opportunities for Pakistan in that regard. The region is rife with potential for more trade, connectivity and integration, with Pakistan already being a player by working on projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This means that Pakistan has an incentive in better trade relationships between other countries in the region as well, particularly Iran, and peace in Afghanistan.

These are all important issues to raise—our goal going towards the meeting is to work towards our foreign policy objectives. So far, Pakistan is doing well—despite the obvious elephant in the room, which is that India is hosting the meeting. Their hosting is something Pakistan can use to its advantage—despite Indian officials throwing baseless allegations as usual, Pakistan has not given in to the theatrics and is focused on policy issues. This will allow us to continue undeterred in our foreign policy goals, as well as reveal India's attempts to put obstacles to connectivity and peace, as it provokes stand-offs with not just Pakistan, but China as well.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/02-Dec-2020/foreign-policy-goals>

Pakistan Now a Pivotal State By Rashid A Mughal

CURRENT global situation and future predicting pundits agree that Asia is going to be the most important region on this earth by 2022. Within Asia some countries due to their sheer economic might and prowess will surpass many developed countries in Europe, Americas and Africa in terms of their GDP and economic and political clout. The reference here is to China which has within 20 years risen from 13th position in terms of GDP in 1970 to number one position in 2019. Its exports rose from \$141.6 Billion in 1995 to \$2293.7 in 2012, surpassing US exports of \$ 2243.5, becoming the largest World exporter. In 2019 Chinese exports touched \$2498.5 as compared to US exports of partly \$1645.17. Pakistan's close relations with China and participation in "OBOR" initiative and CPEC project make Pakistan strategically very important to China due to its ideal location. China will have direct and faster access to its export markets using the Gwadar Port and thus enhancing Pakistan's position as a pivotal state due to its unique location. Gwadar Port will also be a faster raw material route for China compared to its present South China sea-route which has become a tension-zone in view of increased American presence and its imperialistic designs and hegemonic agenda which they want to implement through India.

The fact remains that development of many countries in Asia will directly depend on China and in-directly on Pakistan as bulk of Chinese import-export trade will be through Gwadar, Pakistan. All Central Asian States are land-locked and the nearest port accessible to them will be Gwadar in Pakistan. As astounding as it may sound to most observers, the global pivot state of the 21st century is not China, the USA, nor Russia, but Pakistan. An objective look at the country's geo-strategic and domestic capabilities reveals that it's in a prime position to influentially shape the contours of the coming century. Pakistan's promising economic potential, international connectivity capabilities and unparalleled geo-strategic location combine with its world-class military and proven diplomatic finesse over the decades to turn the South Asian country into the global pivot state of the 21st Century.

It, therefore, should not be surprising that China had the foresight to partner with it decades before anyone else did, but other Great Powers like Russia are finally

awakening to its importance, and this is in turn making Pakistan the most strategically sought-after country in the world. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is Beijing's flagship project of its world-changing Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) because it crucially enables the People's Republic to avoid the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca hot spots and obtain reliable access to the Mideast and Africa.

BRI is redirecting global trade routes from West to East and literally building the basis for the emerging Multi-polar World Order, so considering Pakistan's irreplaceable important role in this process by virtue of CPEC, China's South Asian partner can be re-conceptualized as the cornerstone of Beijing's future world vision. This in itself makes Pakistan pivotal, but there's actually much more to it than just that. The country's domestic economic potential is extremely promising when remembering that it's a nation of over 200 million people uniquely positioned at the crossroads of China's future trade route with the rest of the "Global South". It's little wonder then that major investment players such as Saudi Arabia and UAE are jumping at the opportunity to take part in this before any of their competitors can, wanting to get ahead of race by establishing a premier presence in Pakistan as it becomes the shortest trade route between their economies and China's.

Prophetically, Pakistan's founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah predicted all of this when he famously proclaimed in 1948 that "Pakistan is the pivot of the world, placed on the frontier on which the future position of the world revolves", and each passing day proves that he was right. Contemporary international relations are shaped by an intricate and to a certain extent uneasy co-existing mixture of liberal and realist logics. On the one hand, there are many signs pointing towards inexorably growing interdependencies between states that pave the way to prosperity and peace. On the other hand, there are similar signs that states seem not able to escape realist logic: they persist in pursuing power.

Moreover, states are increasingly drawing lines again, lines with respect to whom they talk to, whom they trade with, and whom they defend against. A change in a pivot state's association has important repercussions for regional and global security. States that find themselves in overlapping spheres of interest are focal points of where great power interests can collide and also clash. States located at the seams of the international system have at various moments in history been crucial to the security and stability of the international system. Approximately two

dozen pivot states tracked show how they have sat in and then shifted from one sphere of influence to another over the past thirty years. A few pivot states energetically mould their immediate security environment pulling considerable weight at the international stage.

Pivotal states are, sometimes, challengers of existing norms of regional orders and cause wider ideological ruptures in the system. Shifting pivot states can dramatically upstage the regional balance of power and upset regional peace and stability. Hence, differences in ideological orientation continue to create strategic opportunities that carry a wide range of security ramifications for old and new powers alike. There are also states that actively try to position themselves as crucial mediators that build bridges and gateways between different great powers, or even across perceived civilisational chasms that cleave through the international system. The UAE in the Middle East, Kazakhstan in Central Asia and Indonesia in South East Asia fulfil pivot states or attempt to fulfil such a role in the international system. Relations with these states can be cultivated, if the aim is to effect change beyond the bilateral relationship.

Other pivot states are more passively pushed around and pressured into associations with great powers. Trapped in 'crush zones', or 'shatter belts', these states are indeed fragile, needy and occasionally capricious. As a rule, they feature political instability and low levels of social and economic development. Seldom are they also endowed with plenty of natural resources. From Venezuela to Uzbekistan down to Iraq: they are found scattered around the world. Whatever the policy aim – whether it is the promotion of good governance or the uninterrupted access to their resources – before setting down on any policy path, it is worth asking whose sphere of influence these pivot states belong to. Some, despite being in dire straits, should not be abandoned. All these roles are crucial for understanding how pivotal States can, if not necessarily will, shape the security environment. And it is these roles that policy-makers should take a closer look at before formulating policies that will shape security environment.

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

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pakistan-now-a-pivotal-state/>

Bureaucratic Reform | Editorial

Moving towards concluding 2020 on a positive note, the Civil Servants' Efficiency and Discipline Rules has been approved by PM Imran Khan. Not only would this initiative incur greater transparency and accountability within the system but it will also bring about adherence to the law, especially needed within the problematic operational structure of the Pakistani Civil Service.

According to the announcement made by the government, the arrangement of the dispersal of authority has been altered to eliminate the Authorised Officer and leave processes in the hands of the Authority and Inquiry Committee. This is positive because it resolves the problem of inconsistent decisions about disciplinary action at lower levels. No longer will officers be able to get away with misdemeanours through experiencing negligible repercussions.

Similarly, provisions on plea bargains and voluntary returns have been made so that accountability is held supreme under this faction of the government. Lastly, the rules have also set specific timelines for procedures such as inquiries, responding to changes and passing decisions on cases. This sense of urgency is especially important considering that often, due to an absence of a fixed timeframe, cases remain open for years. For a body like the civil service, that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the country, such a lackadaisical approach is unacceptable.

Now, the hope is that this new regulation will be followed sincerely, to improve bureaucratic performance, and will be improved upon in the future. The matter of postings, the duration of postings within a specific department as well as providing comprehensive reasons for a change in position, so as to incur a greater check on the government, need to be addressed sooner or later. However, for now, we must eagerly wait to see how the Efficiency and Discipline Rules pan out.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/04-Dec-2020/bureaucratic-reform>

Thaw in Pakistan, Bangladesh Relations? By Kamran Yousaf

Pakistan High Commissioner to Dhaka Imran Ahmed Siddique recently called on Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed. The meeting was seen as yet another sign suggesting easing of years-old tensions between the two countries. Remember, the Bangladeshi PM refused to meet the Indian envoy despite efforts to seek an audience with her, an unprecedented snub given the close ties between Bangladesh and India. The meeting of Pakistani envoy with the Bangladeshi PM was the result of quiet diplomacy being undertaken by the two countries for months. The ice broke first in July when the Pakistani High Commissioner held a meeting with the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, a meeting that raised eyebrows in India. Within a few days of that, Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Bangladeshi counterpart spoke by phone. Imran invited Sheikh Hasina to visit Pakistan while expressing his government's willingness to rest ties with Bangladesh.

These developments were important in the context of the tense relationship between the two countries since 2009. The hiccup in their ties stemmed from Sheikh Hasina's decision to form a war crime tribunal to try her opponents allegedly linked to the 1971 incidents. Pakistan opposed the trial, insisting that events led to the creation of Bangladesh were past and closed transaction given the trilateral agreement signed by Pakistan, Bangladesh and India in 1974. But Sheikh Hasina's government went ahead with the trial and key Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami leaders were later executed. In 2016, Pakistan's parliament passed a unanimous resolution condemning the "politically motivated" trials. Bangladesh objected to Pakistan's condemnation and ties only deteriorated from that point onwards. Meanwhile, the election of Narendra Modi as Indian Prime Minister in 2014 gave a new impetus to ties between Dhaka and New Delhi. Indian influence was so powerful that Bangladeshi politicians, who had a soft corner for Pakistan, had been sidelined at the behest of New Delhi. In 2016, when India boycotted the SAARC summit to be hosted by Pakistan, Bangladesh followed suit.

But the relationship between Bangladesh and India saw a dip when Modi government introduced the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act and its

overall anti-Muslim policies. Amidst all that, China stepped in and deepened ties with Bangladesh. It was because of this that Bangladesh did not even issue a statement when at least 19 Indian soldiers were killed in bloody clashes with Chinese troops in Ladakh. In the middle of all this, Pakistan reached out to Bangladesh with a message that it was ready to reset ties with Dhaka.

The prevailing regional environment is believed to have compelled Islamabad and Dhaka to seek re-engagement.

Pakistan is seeking the activation of consultation mechanism at the foreign ministry level to improve the bilateral ties. The Bangladeshi PM told the Pakistani envoy that there was no ban on such regular activities. The foreign secretaries from the two sides may meet soon to take the next move. However, the statement issued by the Bangladeshi PM Office said the incidents of 1971 cannot be forgotten and forgiven. This shows that the Bangladeshi government is still adamant that Pakistan must formally apologise over the events of 1971. Islamabad nevertheless wants to bury the past and open a new chapter in ties with Bangladesh. The two sides, however, need to seek a mutual closure of bitter events that still haunt them both. In Pakistan, at least there is belief that the new generation in both sides want to move on. Increased people-to-people contact and revival of interaction between the two countries at the official level can help address misgivings. The region and the world are undergoing a transformation and this changing scenario provides an opportunity for both Pakistan and Bangladesh to start a new beginning.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 7th, 2020.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2274912/thaw-in-pakistan-bangladesh-relations>

India Use Water as a Strategic Weapon By

Dr Muhammad Khan

THE canal based irrigation system of Pakistan is considered as one of the oldest and the largest integrated water network in the world. The historical record shows that, the Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC) was originally built by famous Muslim Emperor of India, Shah Jehan in 1693. This canal system was used to carry water of River Ravi from Madhopur to Lahore. Later in the history, improvements were made in the canals system under Sikh Rule in Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Maharaja Ranjit was the popular leader of the Sikh Empire in first half of the 19th century. The Sirhind Canal is yet another large irrigation canal that carried water from the Sutlej River was inaugurated in 1882, during British era. During the British rule, the canal based irrigational was further improved and expanded. Under British India, Punjab became the largest canal based irrigation state and fruit basket, providing food to entire Subcontinent. During the British era, the areas forming part of west Punjab (Pakistani Punjab) had extensive and well-built canal network, thus used to produce maximum agricultural products. These canals were fed by the river water, channelled through several water head works. As a result of manipulated division of Punjab by Boundary Commission under Radcliff Award, all these water head works came under Indian control.

Immediately after independence of Pakistan, India stopped water from flowing into the canals which were irrigating the vast land of Punjab. It created a crises situation in Pakistan and for some time, Pakistan had to pay for the water, it received from Indian controlled water head works. This was the first strategic usage of water by India as a weapon against Pakistan. Later on as a result of bilateral meetings between Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and Indian Premier Nehru, temporary arrangements were made to resume water supply to Pakistan. Nevertheless, the control of head works remained under India for years until World Bank brokered the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) in 1960. Thereafter, Pakistan delinked its canals from eastern rivers and devised a new water feeding system from western rivers. IWT-1960 gave exclusive rights over water of western rivers to Pakistan, which apparently was the best arrangement in the era of cold war. It was a unique agreement over water distribution, since world-wide there have been precedence of division of water, rather division of rivers between upper and lower riparian states. In order to manage the IWT, both states established Indus

Commission which worked well till 1980s. Nevertheless, since India is the upper riparian state and also an illegal occupant of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, who inhabitants wanted to join Pakistan. In the late 1980s, India started manipulated with the water of western rivers, whose water was dedicated exclusively for Pakistan. It started planning and constructing dams, water storages and hydroelectric projects over these rivers.

In a way, India started manipulating with the water of Indus, Jhelum and Chenab against the essence of IWT-1960. It constructed over a dozen large and small dams on all three rivers and water diversion of twenty kilometres on Neelum River a tributary of Jhelum River. It constructed two major dams and hydroelectric projects; Bagliar dam on Chenab River and Kishanganga at Neelum River. Construction of dams, hydroelectric projects and water storages, reduced the down-stream flow of water, which is a serious violation of IWT-1960. This all is being done by India through a well-planned strategy, which aims to exploit Pakistan, desertification of its huge agricultural land. The strategy will constrain and starve the agrarian economy of Pakistan. As an upper riparian, India is using the water as a strategic weapon to coerce its agrarian economy. Since last few years, there is change in framing the water issue by New Delhi. In 2016, Indian Prime Minister Modi said "Blood and Water cannot flow at the same time". This statement came immediately after the Uri terror attack, which Indian RAW planned to defame Pakistan, once Islamabad was planning to refer the massive human rights violations in IIOJK to United Nations, Human Rights Council. In order to subvert the Pakistani plan, the terror attack was planned on a military headquarters in occupied Uri area to blame Pakistan. Later on, it was revealed that, it was a fake attack by Indian spying network to stop Pakistan from making a reference at UN. It is worth mentioning that, sequel to the Shahadat of BurhanWani, India massively used pellet guns and weapons of prohibited bore against the innocent Kashmiri youth in IIOJK. Pakistan wanted to make a strong case against Indian violation of human rights in IIOJK.

Once again in 2017, PM Modi while addressing the peasants in Haryana state said, all water from Indus River System belongs to India thus, not a drop of it should flow to Pakistan. This was a clear threat to Pakistan, which can be inferred as a future Indian strategy to stop water of western rivers. All-together India has formulated an offensive strategy over the water of western rivers. India is using the IWT treaty as a bargaining chip against Pakistan for the consolidation of its illegal occupation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Indian

leadership has threatened many a times to abrogate the Indus Water Treaty. In summary, the Indian strategy is to use water as a strategic weapon against Pakistan. There is an immediate need to counter this Indian hegemonic design against Pakistan. Pakistan must formulate a long-term strategy to secure the water of three western rivers. There should not be any renegotiations over IWT-1960, as stated by Indian leadership in recent years. Besides, Pakistan must make arrangements for the security of water catchment areas and water sources within its geographical territories.

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

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/india-use-water-as-a-strategic-weapon/>

US Policy Towards Pakistan During Biden Presidency By Akbar Jan Marwat

BIDEN will take oath as the 46th President of the United States on 20 January 2021. An important question that is being bandied about, especially in Pakistan is: How is the Biden Presidency going to be different from the Trump Presidency? I would reckon that the basic parameters of the foreign policy under Biden would remain the same with some nuanced differences here and there. Salient US objectives like Pakistan's help with the Afghan peace process and its internal efforts of dismantling the terrorist network at home are likely to remain the same. US-China rivalry, and US-Indian partnership is also expected to continue with a few calibrations in policy during Biden Presidency.

On the positive side, President-elect Biden's policies towards Pakistan are likely to be more mature and rational compared to Trump's. Biden would be assuming the American Presidency with rich experience in foreign relations. During Biden tenure Pakistan is likely to be presented with opportunities to strengthen its strategic and economic ties with the US especially as the US redefines its interests in the region after the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, even during expectations of policy continuity, Biden is expected to usher in a new era in Pak-US relations, in view of his more sympathetic opinion of Pakistan and his broader foreign policy views which are drastically different from Trump, to say the least.

Biden, besides having substantive and in-depth experience of foreign policy, also knows Pakistan very well, as he has visited Pakistan several times as Vice President. Mr Biden has been one of the principal architects, along with Senator John Kerry of the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act of 2009 that prepared the path for the US providing annual civilian assistance of \$1.5 billion to Pakistan between 2010 and 2014. More importantly, Biden believes in dealing with foreign powers through institutions, thus his approach is going to be much more structured and predictable than Trump's unpredictable and erratic approach towards foreign relations. Pak-US relations under Biden Presidency will also to an extent, be dependent upon circumstances and how certain geo-strategic options pan out on the ground in the region. In a favourable scenario, where Pakistan sincerely works towards peace in Afghanistan and successfully moves towards dismantling

the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan, Biden may consider restarting strategic dialogue launched during the Obama era. Biden's familiarity as well as comfort level with Pakistan, can enable the two countries to pursue a meaningful relationship.

Some likely tweaking of American foreign policy may also help Pak-US relationship. Biden is expected to take the edge of the toxic Sino-US relations, which will certainly be welcome for Pakistan. Similarly, Biden Presidency is likely to be less inimical towards Iran, with the option of re-entering the nuclear deal with certain conditions possible. In such an eventuality, Pakistan can enjoy the benefit of buying cheap energy from Iran. American under Biden are going to continue their close ties with India, but the possibility of the US questioning India about its human rights abuses in Kashmir and other places will certainly be present. On the other hand, if the US, Afghan peace efforts in Afghanistan go pear-shaped and America somehow believes that it is because of Pakistan, the Biden Administration may hold back on expanding relations with Pakistan. This will, however, be an unfair expectation from Pakistan, to singularly resolve the highly complex situation in Afghanistan.

As American's deepening security relationship with India grows, the US is likely to lessen its criticism of India on Kashmir. The US is more likely to press Pakistan, on taking action against India-specific militant groups on its soil. But unlike Trump, in spite of leaning towards India, Biden is still expected to take steps to restore the US's role as a strategic balancer between India and Pakistan. No doubt, America under the Biden presidency will try to bring down the heat a notch or two in the US-Sino relationship. But American's desire to blunt China's ambitious Belt and Road initiative and to contain its rise as a global power will continue. To be able to do this, US's strategic and geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific region will remain closely aligned with India. If Pakistan manages to keep a neutral position in the US-Sino relationship, it will be in a position to provide a communication back-channel between the US and China, if and when it is needed. Pakistan has already played the role once before in the 70s, when Islamabad facilitated Washington's outreach to Beijing. The facilitation resulted in President Richard Nixon paying a historic official visit to China in 1972.

In any case, Pak-US relations seem to be approaching an inflection point. As American troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan, Biden's broader Asia policy will

need a new basis. The test of Pakistan's foreign policy would be, to keep Pakistan relevant in case of Biden's broader Asia policies of encircling China. Pakistan still needs to be on a very friendly basis with the US in spite of its closeness with China. Washington is Islamabad's largest trading partner, with an annual trade of \$6.5. Islamabad also needs Washington assistance to continue receiving financial help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Similarly, Pakistan also needs Washington's support to be taken out of the increased monitoring list of the Financial Action Tasks Force (FATF) – the global watchdog for terror financing.

One thing is very clear, Pakistan needs to have good relations with the only superpower in the world for a number of reasons. But Pakistan must also make some efforts, instead of waiting for the US Administration to do all the groundwork. Pakistan's discriminating taxation laws, regulating barriers and weak intellectual property safe ground, have to be reformed, to make Pakistan an attractive destination for American investment. This time around, Pak-US relations should perhaps revolve more around less tension creating spaces like education; IT; and clean energy's rather than unrealistic expectation about security co-operation. Recalibrating ties in this manner, will certainly keep Pakistan important for Biden' America's hopefully for the right reasons this time.

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

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/us-policy-towards-pakistan-during-biden-presidency/>

Pak-US Relations and the Nuclear Factor By

Durdana Najam

The foundation for America's "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific was laid when Richard Nixon became the president of the United States. It demanded a new beginning in the US-China relationship for which the US reached out to Pakistan. For the following two years, Pakistan played the role of a messenger between Nixon and Chairman Mao. Pakistan facilitated a secret visit of secretary of state Henry Kissinger to China on July 9, 1971, and was rewarded for this diplomatic service with a temporary relaxation on arms sales ban, which was imposed in 1965. As a result, Iran and Jordan were given a green signal to assist Pakistan militarily. It was not until the House Foreign Affairs Committee took notice of this violation that Nixon announced suspension of all aids and conditioned its restoration to the resolution of the political issues in East Pakistan. This did not however stop the Nixon administration from releasing \$24 million worth of military equipment that had been blocked since 1971. The 1967 arms supply policy was also reinstated.

In the meantime, prime minister Bhutto, wary of the duplicitous and inconsistent US role in the 1971 war and India's direct intervention in the creation of Bangladesh, had propelled Pakistan on the path of developing nuclear weapons for national security. Though after Nixon's resignation in August 1974, his successor president Ford had lifted the arm sales ban on Pakistan, it did little to normalise the relations that had become exceedingly sour because of Bhutto's refusal to discontinue or suspend Pakistan's journey to nuclearisation. The situation aggravated when Kissinger, during his visit to India in October 1974, described it as the 'pre-eminent power' in the region.

President Jimmy Carter kept the pressure high on Pakistan and to dwarf its image he marked India as the potential regional power in the revised US-South Asia foreign policy. To reinforce this policy, Carter made a visit to India on January 1, 1978, and, unlike his predecessors, did not stop in Pakistan. General Ziaul Haq, who was also the president of the country, following in the footsteps of Bhutto, refused to bend to the US threat and accepted sanctions on economic aid.

While the US-Pakistan relationship floundered because of nuclear-related issues, the India-US relationship strengthened for the same reason. Instead of punishing New Delhi for exploding the nuclear device, the US was providing enriched-uranium fuel to India for nuclear power reactors at Tarapur, near Bombay. Matters became worse when an interagency group in the US led by arms-control expert Gerard Smith told The New York Times that the US had an option to attack Pakistan's nuclear facility in Kahuta.

In October 1979, Agha Shahi, Pakistan's foreign minister, went to the US to try and break the deadlock. His counterpart, secretary of state Cyrus Roberts Vance laid down three conditions for the continuation of any talk: First, that Pakistan would not transfer nuclear technology to other countries. Second, that it will open its nuclear facilities to international inspection. Third, that it would not test a nuclear device. Pakistan agreed to comply with only the first condition. Shahi made it clear that unless India opened its nuclear facilities to inspection, Pakistan would not comply with the request.

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the US-Pakistan relations bounced back to normalisation. Carter called Zia and revisited the 1959 bilateral security agreement to thwart Communist aggression and offered to bolster Pakistan's security. Zbigniew Brzezinski, president Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, is reported to have said: "Circumstance required the United States to set aside concerns about Pakistan's nuclear programme, at least temporarily."

The war began and the US was okay with Pakistan's assurance that its nuclear programmes would not embarrass the former. To the experts the assurance was a tacit agreement that even if Pakistan made the bomb, it would not explode it. Nevertheless, to assuage congressional pressure to keep a check on Pakistan's nuclear-related activities, president Reagan agreed to the Pressler Amendment. The bill suggested that Pakistan would not be provided any military or technological equipment unless the American president certified that Pakistan did not "possess" a nuclear explosive device and that the assistance provided by the US would "reduce significantly the risk that Pakistan will possess a nuclear explosive device". The catch was in the term "possession" that was left open to wild interpretation and was dependent on the intelligence report, which at that point of time did not 'reveal' that Pakistan's nuclear-related activities were progressing because of US assistance. The bill hence favoured the continuation

of military and economic assistance and Pakistan received \$4 billion in aid in 1986.

The assessment began to change as the war drew closer to an end. Pakistan was told that: “With the departure of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the winding down of the Cold War the policy dynamic on the nuclear issue had changed.” The apparently toothless bill would soon become Pakistan’s nemesis with sanctions imposed on it for clandestinely running the nuclear explosive programme.

Since the amendment came on the heels of the Afghan war’s end, it brought into spotlight the ‘disposability’ factor that relates to the US behaviour of abandoning Pakistan after ‘using’ it for achieving its foreign policy objectives. The duplicity had once again corroborated a general belief that the US uses a fickle-minded approach in its relations with Pakistan.

For all its efforts, however, the US could not bring either India or Pakistan to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty and could do little to prevent both countries from testing nuclear devices in May 1998. In a typical reaction, the US condemned Pakistan but accepted India’s stance as a natural deterrent against China. It would not be wrong to say that America’s duplicitous and India-centric nuclear policy in South Asia has plunged the region into an arms race.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 10th, 2020.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2275333/pak-us-relations-and-the-nuclear-factor>

Pakistan-China-Iran Trilateral Cooperation

By Nawazish Ali

“Economy and environment are the same thing. That is the rule of nature”. (Mollie Beattie) The significance of financial resources is central to the possibility of economic collaboration among various countries all around the globe. However, the commercial linkages in state-to-state relations cannot be entirely independent of political and strategic environment of the region in particular and the world in broad-spectrum. Respective national interests may not always align when more than one country are involved and economic cooperation that has the potential to create a win-win situation for all the parties involved should not be neglected.

China’s rise, Iran’s attempted economic isolation by the USA and Pakistan’s crucial geostrategic location are all factors that have the capacity to bring these three countries in sync. China and Pakistan have a long history of deep friendship. The evolving China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has further created prospects for adjacent regional countries to benefit from this connectivity.

The challenges to these initiatives are many as the security situation in the region has always remained worrying. Terrorism, religious extremism, sectarian clashes and interference of extra-regional actors are only a few challenges that stand in the way of this nexus. The internal challenges of political instability and socio-economic factors can also affect this relationship adversely. However, if the leadership, governments’ policies and public opinion in these three countries remain steadfast in support of this trilateral cooperation, there is no doubt, the success of this interconnection would change the economic and regional balance of Asia forever.

Iran is pivotal to the realization of China’s trans- continental, infrastructure-focused One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative in ways that Saudi Arabia is not

China’s economic rise, its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), its widespread global influence and connectivity initiatives make it the next world power in making as a rival to the USA. South Asia, East Asia and the Middle East are regions that occupy Centre stage in

world businesses. Their cultural diversity, natural resources, maritime routes, geography and conflicts have wide ranging implications even for the day-to-day affairs of almost all countries worldwide. With such adjacent allies, Pakistan can surely achieve prominent stature in the regional and global arena.

Pakistan has been facing challenges to its national security due to the turbulent situation in Afghanistan since 1979. Iran and China also have serious security and economic concerns tied up at fag-end of global war on terror. Iran and Pakistan have not seen eye to eye on the solution to Afghan war in the past as Iran backed the Northern Alliance after the Taliban seized power in 1996 whereas Pakistan, on the other hand, recognised the Taliban government in Afghanistan. China has high stakes in Afghanistan as it seeks to link it to its grand initiative of the Belt and Road (BRI). The Chinese access to Central Asian states and their oil resources is thwarted by the constant state of turmoil in Afghanistan not to mention the fear of spillover from northern Afghanistan into Xinjiang.

The peaceful Afghanistan is vital and stays a point of unification for these three countries, if they wish to effectively counter the Indo-US dominance in South Asia.

They need to make sure that US withdrawal from Afghanistan should not plunge the AfPak region into another civil war that would certainly upset the regional peace and any chances of further trilateral cooperation among these three countries. The significant role recently played by Pakistan in the Afghan peace process provides an opening for cooperation by Iran and China as their regional interests of keeping peace in Afghanistan align perfectly with those of Pakistan.

Iran and India enjoy a friendly relationship as the two have shared a cultural and linguistic affinity for a long time and further warmed up to each other when they signed a significant defence agreement in the year 2002. Following that, the two have engaged in several trade contracts, the most prominent of which has been the Chahbahar Free Trade Agreement. In response to the launch of Gwadar port, as the sign of friendship between China and Pakistan, India pledged to assist Iran in expediting construction of Chahbahar port.

Iran is pivotal to the realization of China's trans-continental, infrastructure-focused One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative in ways that Saudi Arabia is not.

Iran's oil and gas reserves, fourth and second largest in the world, spell out a boon for China's exponentially rising energy needs. Out of the three markets that Iran's massive piped gas reserves can be sold to, the closest and most accessible is China.

Gwadar is a deep-sea port with harbouring potential manifold that of the size of Chahbahar, which is only feasible for a transit trade arrangement via Afghanistan.

Iran has quite tactfully declared Chahbahar a 'sister port' to Gwadar and managed to keep the option for cooperation with China open for all future ventures. Hence, it is evident from the Iranian stance that it wishes to bring its maximum resources to the CPEC for all practical purposes. Having stable economic cooperation with Pakistan, Iran can quite easily extend it further to China.

China and Iran also reiterated their deep strategic cooperation ahead of the expected Saudi investment in Pakistan, which means that China does not stand opposed to either Saudi or the Iranian participation in the upcoming CPEC projects. Rather it provides China more avenues of participation and cooperation in the Middle East and Gulf region. China as a persuasive force in the SCO will make it easier for Pakistan to link energy corridors and, if Iran's bid to join the SCO is also accepted, it will be another economic opportunity for the nexus among these three countries.

China as a rising economic power is making linkages worldwide and is offering monetary and commercial opportunities for developing countries with resources to join the wave of economic harmony. A potent economic force is expected to emerge in the foreseeable future having an anti-American agenda at heart.

However, it will take serious concerted efforts from the regional players to resolve mutual differences and be determined to cooperate on economic fronts with one another to ensure regional harmony and prosperity. There are many avenues for cooperation and a huge amount of untapped potential lies in this trilateral collaboration that needs to be utilized to the maximum. Pakistan's significant geographical location stays central to this new emerging bloc.

Source:<https://dailytimes.com.pk/699668/pakistan-china-iran-trilateral-cooperation-2/>

Indian Disinformation | Editorial

AN extensive investigation by a European group has come up with startling findings about an Indian network aggressively promoting disinformation. According to the EU DisinfoLab, the mission of this network is to discredit nations in conflict with India in Asia — especially Pakistan (but also China).

Its long-term objective gives credence to the term ‘fifth-generation warfare’, as the campaign aims to reinforce pro-India sentiment while pushing anti-Pakistan sentiment across the world by manipulating the media. With a dual goal to consolidate India’s power and image in the world and damage the reputation of other countries, the Indian network has worked diligently since 2005 to get favourable support from international institutions such as the EU and UN.

In order to achieve this, the network created NGOs, think tanks and ‘fake’ news media outlets to influence the European Parliament and create the impression that pro-India, anti-Pakistan interests have support in European institutions. The network even repackages and disseminates news through Indian wire agency ANI, as well as little known media networks in 97 countries, to amplify anti-Pakistan content. Shockingly, the network resurrected a dead professor by using his identity and used 750 fake media outlets to push its propaganda.

The sheer volume of information revealed about this network is astounding. Although the European group has cautioned against attributing the network and its activities to Indian intelligence agencies definitively, there is a big question mark hanging over the Indian government which must explain who is behind this campaign. After all, its pro-India, anti-Pakistan stance, as well as its carefully constructed fake-news machinery, is benefiting the Indian government and its aspirations of a ‘dominant India’ narrative.

The international community must raise its voice and demand an explanation from New Delhi about this group, which continues to operate despite being exposed for the first time last year. Such propaganda is dangerous and has far-reaching consequences.

The network’s attempts to create a negative impression of Pakistan through fake news betrays a sinister campaign which is beginning to define the conflict of our

times. The EU DisinfoLab's evidence-based analysis is led by the belief that citizens should be well-informed about the source of information and that they understand the context. This principle is key to preventing people from being manipulated, especially on social media.

Their stellar investigation should serve as a wake-up call for India to punish such actors who intentionally engage in disinformation and abuse international institutions.

Published in Dawn, December 11th, 2020

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595146/indian-disinformation>

Revival of SAARC | Editorial

AT a webinar, organized by the Institute of Regional Studies and participated by representatives from the member countries to mark 36th Charter Day of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), speakers emphasized the need for revival of the Association to help realize the cherished objectives for which it was formed – to promote regional cooperation and to accelerate the pace of social and economic development in South Asia. They believed there was no other choice for the member states as they have already invested too much in the organization to let it go dormant.

SAARC, indeed, has the potential to contribute significantly towards socio-economic development of a region which encapsulates one-fifth of the humanity and is bestowed with immense natural resources as well as human resource. Pooling of the resources can help mitigate sufferings of the people of the region but the organization has not been able to move forward in the spirit of its Charter mainly because of political differences and trust deficit among member countries. This is despite the fact that there have been calls from saner elements that difference apart the organization should move on issues on which there is consensus as mutual cooperation would be beneficial for all countries because of similarity of issues especially backwardness. There was also a positive suggestion from Dr. Rabilal Dhakael, an academic from Bhutan, who called for modifying the SAARC Charter to enable it to discuss all issues confronted by the member countries including the contentious ones. He was justified in criticizing the unanimity clause in the SAARC Charter for decision-making, which has become one of the major obstacles in turning the platform into a vibrant tool for regional cooperation. India has repeatedly misused this clause to disallow hosting of SAARC summit in Pakistan and implementation of otherwise workable proposals mooted by other members for boosting cooperation in different fields. India has become a spoiler and this has been confirmed once again by the message that the Indian Prime Minister released on the occasion in which he has raised accusing fingers as far as the issue of terrorism is concerned, without, of course, realizing that his own country was the biggest state-sponsor of terrorism. As against this, Prime Minister of Pakistan made an impassioned appeal for sharing of resources for providing a better future to the vulnerable segments of our societies through the platform provided by SAARC. In this backdrop, there is

dire need for amending the SAARC Charter so that the Association could take decisions with majority vote.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/revival-of-saarc/>

The Future of Pak-US Transactional Relations By Shakoor Ahmed Shah

MORE than 70 years long Pak-US alliance in various fields is being reengineered by both the allies. The integral role of Pakistan against the (former) Soviet Union, war against terrorism, US-Taliban negotiations and defending the US interests in the region is no more hidden. Pakistan was compelled by the US for alliance on the global war on terror. Pakistan willy-nilly consented to three conditions. Northern Alliance will not control Kabul, assistance in Kashmir issue and the safety of nuclear assets. But the US again proved its fair weather friendship and backed out. The US was aware of Pakistani financial constraints, so it used economic weapons likewise in the past to force Islamabad to do more. Pakistan has paid a heavy price than NATO for \$10 billion. The three promises were altered with financial, diplomatic and debt reduction support. Pakistani strategic interests were slaughtered by economic boost through US aid and Afghan refugee funds.

The US gave a new turn to Pak-US relations by the controversial Abbottabad Operation. The US wanted to shake off Pakistani pressure. The NATO forces air raid on Pakistani soldiers in 2011 further deteriorated the relations. The border closure for NATO supplies for Afghanistan added fuel to fire regarding bilateral relations concerning Pakistan security issues. The US took another turn by developing ties with India to pressurize Pakistan. Pakistan also realized that it can no longer move ahead due to its economic dependency on the US. Pakistan sought out China to substitute the US for economic support. The US faced an unexpected situation in Afghanistan as certain forces were supporting Taliban to push the lion back to its den.

The US also committed certain strategic mistakes by opening many war grounds far away from its territory which resulted in its defeat in many regions. Along with other objectives of the US invasion in Afghanistan was to get hold of the Asia-Pacific region. The region comprises 20 world economies with a total GDP of \$67 trillion. Six of the world's top economies are contemporary in this region. China, the world's second largest economy is participating heavily in the region through its CPEC and OBOR projects. The US' initial interests in Afghanistan have been accomplished through Pakistan, now it is stepping ahead for greater targets in

the Asia-Pacific region. The increasing Chinese role in the region has compelled India to join hands with the US contrary to India's past reluctance to join the US alliance. The US is reengineering its relations with India which will ultimately give a jolt to the Pak-US relations.

The US-India alliance is aimed to control Chinese influence in the region while Pak-China are collaborating in development. The US-India wants to control sea-lanes and trade corridors of the regions which are detrimental to Pak-China and Russian interests. India has developed ties with the US to pressurize Pakistan while the US wants to empower India to confront China. The US-India ties have surely shaken Pak-US relations as the US support to India is resulting in losing balance of power in the region which may result into a nuclear flash point in the region. As the US-India ties started growing, Pakistan shifted its policy from the US to China diplomatically. The US targets in the Middle East can easily be achieved through India as the US has loose hold over there. Asia-Pacific will smother the way to the US fidgets in both South Asia and the Middle East. Iran being Islamic as well as neighbour of Pakistan is on the top list of the US challenges. The US-India-Israel ties are posing a danger to Iran and broadly to the Middle East which is not favourable for Pakistan. The US future demand for cooperation from Pakistan in case of the US-Iran conflict, Pakistan might not follow the instructions as it has shaken its neck from the US economic yoke. Great powers always hanker after rising regional powers, and the US' decision of shaking hands with India is a wrong turn as none of the Indian neighbours is on term with it. CPEC and Pak-Russian joint military exercises have given a clear clue to the US. The US has tried to impose sanction on Pakistan for obtaining the latest technology under several pretexts on Indian provocations but has failed to do so. The US-Indian ties have malicious targets of divide and rule Asia by destabilizing.

South Asia is one of the biggest markets of the US manufactured weapons. If the Kashmir issue is resolved its weapon manufacturing will get a great setback. Pak-US relations were the exigency of Pakistani strategic policy to get updated technology and defence apparatus to cope with Indian aggression. Pak-US relations have always been transactional, varying in accordance with the US interests. Pak-US relations have entered a new era where both the countries need dialogues to reshape, reengineer and redefine their relations on an equal basis to collaborate for achieving greater goals and global peace. It is crystal clear that Pakistan has always been aspiring for peace and prosperity in the

region and it is practical about it. Pakistan has good relations to all its neighbours contrary to India. Unlike India, Pakistan has done a practical job in bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan while India is involved in terror activities in Afghanistan to prolong the US stay over there for its vested interests.

The US still needs Pakistan in stabilizing Afghan situation. Pakistan is very crucial for the US than India as it can alleviate anti-Americanism in the Muslim world and building good ties with the Islamic States. For decreasing US-China tension Pakistan is a bridge as it is a friend of both. President Biden has sound knowledge of Pakistan as compared to his predecessors. He has drafted Pakistan-centric legislation, made multiple visits, developed intimate ties with military and civilian patronage and experienced directly the best and worst periods of the Pak-US relationship history. He has even been bestowed with Hilal-i-Pakistan Award. In this perspective, Pak-US relations seem strengthening in future.

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

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/the-future-of-pak-us-transactional-relations/>

Balance of Power Through Pak-China

Defense Cooperation! By Attiya Munawer

Pakistan and China are bound in everlasting ties of love and friendship. The long lasting, deep and strong fraternal ties between the two countries are based on mutual trust, confidence and respect, so the changes that have taken place at the international level have never had an effect, but the relationship has improved over time. Pak-China relations are paramount in every field. In recent years, China has turned its attention to invest in Pakistan and also several Chinese companies are operating in different sectors in Pakistan. China has always strived to make Pakistan one of the developed nations and is always ready to work side by side in all areas including, economic, energy and defense. From cooperation in aviation from Pakistan to the exchange of delegations in trade and cultural fields, the two countries have not only grown closer, but these contacts have been very helpful in getting acquainted with each other's culture and civilization. And now on the occasion of the Chinese Defense Minister's visit to Pakistan, it has been agreed to increase defense cooperation. Due to India's aggressive demeanor, Pakistan is on the path of invincibility while maintaining its defense resources, and China is fully cooperating in making Pakistan's defense invincible.

In the current objective situation, Pak-China relations are important. India is buying state-of-the-art military weapons from all over the world; its main target is Pakistan. Where India is invading Pakistani borders, it is also challenging China. In this context, Pakistan and China have come closer. Strategic ties between Pakistan and China are important for peace, stability and development in the region, so both sides reaffirm their commitment to further strengthen the everlasting Pak-China Strategic Cooperative Partnership to build a community with a common future in the new era. In this regard, CPEC is a major transformational project in the region. Completion of CPEC projects will not only open new doors of development and prosperity for the people of Pakistan, but will also create more opportunities for expansion in China's economy. The civil and military leadership of Pakistan is hopeful for the success of CPEC, which will prove to be a milestone in Pak-China friendship and the completion of this project will bring immense economic benefits to both the countries.

There is no doubt that the CPEC project will pave the way for prosperity and development in the region, but India is working hard to sabotage such an important project. The United States is backing India in light of the changing situation in the region, while China and Pakistan have welcomed the signing of a peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan, both hoping that the international community will now fully support Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction and economic development. The United States and India signed a defense agreement two months ago to provide sensitive satellite data in response to efforts by Pakistan and China to save the region from armed conflict. The agreement was reached at a time when India's border dispute with China was at its height, and with the help of this sensitive data, India will be able to accurately and precisely target missiles, drones and other targets. India has apparently done the deal for China in the US interest, but its real target is Pakistan, which is why the Indian Prime Minister has started openly threatening his neighbors. It is not possible for Pakistan in such a situation to watch the deteriorating defense balance hand in hand, Pakistan will have to meet the need for latest technology.

India is preparing to impose a regular war on Pakistan intoxicated with modern nuclear weapons obtained from various countries including the United States, France, Germany and Britain. So, any major tragedy could happen tomorrow at his hands, but the international community is silent in the guise of its own interests. OIC, the representative body of the Muslim world, in its meeting focused on the ongoing Indian fanaticism in occupied Kashmir, urged India to restore the constitutional status of Kashmir and resolve the Kashmir issue on the basis of Security Council resolutions. The Indian leadership is on fire and is trying to escalate the atmosphere of provocation by making awkward statements against Pakistan. If its expansionist ambitions are not curtailed, the peace and security of the region will be at stake.

Undoubtedly, the world is not ready to stop India's fanatics, even though they are aware of their extremist ambitions, because their interests stand in the way. In view of the emerging situation on the world stage, Pakistan will have to seriously consider its options and make decisions in the context of national interest. Pakistan has long been an ally of the United States. But now in the changing circumstances, the United States has made India the focus of its hopes in the region. Pakistan needs the CPEC project and Chinese investment to secure its economic future. While the CPEC project is a means of further strengthening

friendship with China, it has also distanced itself from the United States. The growing conflict between China and the United States will definitely increase the diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. Pakistan has to do its best to avoid falling into the trap of competition between the two major powers. However, Pakistan and China need a new balance of power in the region. Pak-China bilateral defense relations can help maintain the balance of power.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/698026/balance-of-power-through-pak-china-defense-cooperation/>

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Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/698026/balance-of-power-through-pak-china-defense-cooperation/>

Biden Won; Now What ? A Case For Pakistan By Hareem Bilal

DON'T we all dream of a parallel universe in which states were sovereign and the people didn't have to care about elections of a country thousands of miles away? Perhaps in a world; not as unipolar, not as divided, not as dependent as ours could we all live – and die – in a world that wasn't governed by neo-realistic ideals and forces. Mayhap in such a world could all of us be free? Alas! Our dreams are just that, and American politics decides the course of the globalized world. The white man's burden has embedded its claws in the very soil we decay in and on the very waters, we survive. As non-Americans, we have to care, be aware, and be informed about the political, economic, and social status of the United States because it is essentially our livelihood that is at stake; our lives that are at the stake.

A win, a loss – a legacy, a fall: Putin, in one of his interviews said, “I have already spoken to three US Presidents. They come and go but politics stays the same. Do you know why? Because of the powerful bureaucracy” and, “changing things is not easy, I say that without irony”. These statements are universal and apply to every democracy – pseudo or otherwise – around the globe. Trump couldn't deliver on his promise of compelling Mexico to pay for a border wall, nor could he lower the national debt of his country. Perhaps the 46th American President would be able to deliver on promises made during the campaign.

The left on being right: “Make America great again” – in subjective terms, one can say that this slogan was a call to bring the American people back to their roots and help them resurge as a single, united nation altogether. Another perspective could be looking at in purely objective, political and capitalistic terms – to counter the growing threat of another rapidly rising economic power. The same ideals that went into the making of the said slogan in Trump's era can be seen manifested into Biden's claims and promises. For instance, Biden's plans to restore the foreign policy of the States and perhaps take on China, along with his ambitious goals to bring the US economy out of one of the greatest slowdowns in order to create jobs and revenue are exactly in line with the “make America great” agenda. Trump's era might have been tumultuous, but his unorthodox approach clearly has shown the world what democrats have wanted to sub-due –

the right-wing mindset takes over the left in key issues prevalent in the United States and her foreign policy. The only difference is: the left knows just how to flirt with the core leftist ideologies in order to buy apt time to reinforce the right's agendas.

A dream that is American: Today, the American dream which used to attract millions from around the globe into its promises of providence and good fortune is becoming undone by the inequality – racial, economic, social, political and ethnic – which exists within the very roots that gave rise to the United States of America. As the American dream takes its last breaths, the “first female coloured Vice President” of the country only holds it together with threads intricately woven and thoroughly marred with crimes against the innocent in the war-torn regions of the Middle East.

Pakistan: A wounded warrior: We try to sugar-coat our freedom but are we truly free when our economic ties, structures and functions are controlled by the developments of highly polarized world order? You won't see a whole lot of changes in the future. According to Biden's claims of reversing Trump's draconian immigration policies, a few of us might get our visas approved but beyond that; the FATF, the World Bank and the IMF – all being largely influenced by the superpower won't be any leaner in their policies towards Pakistan; at least not until China and Pakistan remain close allies. On the topic of Afghanistan and Pakistan's role in the mediating process, there is a general consensus among the experts that it won't be as hasty and fast-paced as it was under Trump's era. On Kashmir, democrats wouldn't be as dismissive about human rights violations as their predecessors. Yes, they won't put their long-term bilateral relationship with India on the line, but they won't necessarily sideline Pakistan's claim either.

The way forth, dreams and realities: Are countries like us allowed to dream dreams of progress then? Sure we are. Being a citizen of a state which was carved out through a democratic process with intellectuals like Jinnah leading us through times of great tumultuous, we know, more than anyone that dreams can change the course of the world. Let us dream, however, let us not only dream but also let us “do” too. Be it, Biden or Trump, for the sake of our nationalism, our interests should come first. Let us protect them and move forward with a foreign policy that secures the national interests of our country without undermining its sovereignty. Be it, Biden or Trump, Pakistan should look to succeed and to succeed with great honour, privilege and freedom. Be it, Biden or Trump, the

world moves forth and hopes that the United States and her great people would understand the sufferings of those around the world; sufferings that they caused, directly or indirectly. Be it, Biden or Trump, let us hope for a better world, a freer, more peaceful world.

—The Islamabad-based writer occasionally contributes to the national press.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/biden-won-now-what-a-case-for-pakistan/>

Geo-Strategic Importance of Pakistan-Russia Relations By Sajjad Shaukat

There are no permanent friends and enemies in international politics. Friendship and enmity change in accordance with the states' interests which are of primary importance.

During the Cold War, Pakistan was allied with the USA and the former USSR backed India.

Following the end of the Cold War, the USA left both Pakistan and Afghanistan to face the fallout of the Afghan war 1.

After the 9/11 tragedy, the USA, again needed Pakistan's help. Pakistan was granted the status of non-NATO ally by the USA due to the early successes, achieved by Pakistan's Army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) against the Al-Qaeda militants.

But, when the US-led allies felt that they are failing in coping with the stiff resistance of the Taliban in Afghanistan, especially the USA started accusing the Pakistan Army and ISI of supporting the Afghan Taliban.

When the US-led NATO decided to end the prolonged war in Afghanistan and to withdraw its forces, again, Washington needed Pakistan's assistance. Since the US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad started his efforts to convince the Taliban to have direct talks with the USA, he admitted that Pakistan has been playing a major role which also resulted into the US and Taliban agreement in Doha, the capital of Qatar on February 29.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had particularly, thanked Islamabad for efforts in helping reach the agreement. Visiting top US civil and military officials are still praising Pakistan.

At the same time, the USA, which has signed several agreements, including defence pact, with India, is still supporting New Delhi to counterbalance China.

In the recent past, during his visit to New Delhi, US Secretary of State Pompeo along with Defense Secretary Mark Esper, the USA and India signed a pact to share sensitive satellite and map data, as Pompeo warned of the threat posed by an increasingly assertive China.

In its report on Counter Terrorism released on June 24, 2020, the US State Department allegedly stated that Pakistan continued to serve as a safe haven for regionally focused terrorist groups and allowed groups to target India and Afghanistan.

Next day, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed disappointment over the US Report on Terrorism, describing it as self-contradictory and selective by elaborating: "Pakistan will not allow any group or entity to use its territory against any country."

Recently, Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN Munir Akram handed over to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres a dossier on India's campaign to promote terrorism in Pakistan by pointing out that it was violation of international law, the UN Charter and Security Council resolutions.

Taking cognizance of the US double game, Islamabad has been strengthening its relations with the Russian Federation.

During his first trip to Moscow, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa on April 24, met with the Commander of Russian Ground Forces Col Gen Oleg Salyukov who acknowledged achievements of Pakistan Army in fight against terrorism. He stated that Pakistan is a geostrategically important country and Russia was keen to expand its existing bilateral military-to-military cooperation.

Russia and China favour Pakistan's efforts towards reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan, which are essential for the whole region.

On 9 June 2017, Pakistan's then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif held a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Astana, Kazakhstan. President Putin stated:

“Pakistan is an important partner for Russia in South Asia” and congratulated Mr Sharif on Pakistan’s full membership to the SCO.

An agreement had been signed in Islamabad on 7 August 2018 between Pakistan and Russia for the training of Pakistani troops in Russia. Pakistan’s defence ties with Moscow are growing strong and this pact has opened new avenues of cooperation.

On 27 September 2018, Pakistan and Russia signed a historic \$10 billion offshore gas pipeline agreement in Moscow. The project will help Russia cement its place in the energy market of Pakistan. Under the agreement, a state-owned Pakistani company will collaborate with Russia’s energy giant company Gazprom. On 6 February 2019, during a visit of the Russian delegation, headed by Gazprom, the Russian side pledged an investment of \$14 billion in the offshore gas pipeline project.

Islamabad will also gain access to the Russian market to boost its overall exports, while Moscow offered to revive Pakistan steel mill.

Islamabad and Moscow agreed on 22 May 2019 to enhance cooperation in various fields, including trade, energy and defence sectors. The agreement was reached at a meeting between Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.

As regards the military relations, a defense-counter terrorism related agreement was signed in 2014. Under the deal four Mi35 helicopters were also sold by Russia to Pakistan. Since 2016, Islamabad and Moscow have been conducting joint military exercises named DRUZBHA.

Pakistan has already allowed Russia to use Gwadar port through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Islamabad plans to join CPEC with the Eurasian economic union (Central Asian Republics).

Moreover, in a meeting held between the USA, Russia, China and Pakistan in Beijing in July 2019, the four countries had called on the Taliban to immediately agree to a ceasefire and to engage in direct negotiations with the Afghan government.

Nonetheless, the Russia-Pakistan-China alliance for collective security against terrorism, emanating from the India-US nexus, in checking the emerging realities in Indo-Pacific and the larger Eurasia, Pakistan-Russia relations have geostrategic importance.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/12/22/geo-strategic-importance-of-pakistan-russia-relations/>

Reappraisal of Pakistan—Iran Relations By Dr Farooq Hasnat & Dr Zamurrad Awan

In the second week of November, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif visited Pakistan on a two-day visit. His delegation included political, strategic, and economic experts. During this brief but busy stay, he had detailed meetings with the Pakistani civil as well as military leadership and discussed issues relating to the security and peace in the region, including enhancement of trade and economic partnership. This is Javad Zarif's tenth visit to Pakistan as Foreign Minister, while his fourth contact with Prime Minister Imran Khan's government in the last two and a half years. It conveys a strong message that in the rapidly changing regional context, it becomes imperative for two brotherly neighbours to assess the fast-changing regional, political, and economic alignments, which seriously affects both the countries to readjust their strategic placement.

Before going further in assessing the significance of this visit, it is relevant to comprehend the historic, religious, cultural, and geographic relevance of Iran and Pakistan for each other. After 1947, Iran, along with Turkey became a focus of attention for the founding fathers and the subsequent leadership paid special attention to forging an alliance based on trust and respect, embedded in cultural and historic similarities and interdependence. It was realised that for its strategic needs, Pakistan could trust these two vital non-Arab Muslim nations of the Middle East. It is no coincidence that Quaid's close companion Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan was carefully chosen and appointed as Pakistan's first Ambassador to Iran (1948-1952) and subsequently to Turkey (1952-1953). His assignment was to lay a solid foundation of close ties with these two natural allies of Pakistan.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran received widespread blessings from the people of Pakistan, and during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Pakistan tilted towards Iran and understood that Saddam Hussein was the aggressor. Even in the subsequent difficult circumstances, both the countries felt comfortable enough to resolve any glitches that came their way.

In recent days, Pakistan firmly condemned the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. In a strong-worded statement Pakistan extended "sincere condolences to the family members of Mr Fakhrizadeh and to the Iranian

people.” The statement further warned that “such acts not only run contrary to all norms of interstate relations and International Law but also threaten the peace and stability of an already fragile region”.

Similarly, taking religious and cultural connections into consideration, around 0.3 million pilgrims from Pakistan visit Iran every year, on a regular basis. Secondly, a considerable number of Urdu words are derived from the Persian language. The historic parallels between the two languages can also be gauged by the fact that 60 percent of Allama Iqbal’s poetry is in Persian, and nearly all of Pakistan’s national anthem is in the same language. This deep connection between the religion and culture of both countries has played an important role in keeping them connected. Despite these deep ties, the volume of trade between the two countries has remained low. It is expected that the recent visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister would lay a foundation for the enhancement of trade and investment collaborations. According to the joint statement, the most important steps to boost mutual trade include plans to open new markets on the Pak-Iran border and an agreement to open border markets and various border crossings. It will not only boost trade but also facilitate people-to-people contact. In this regard, Pakistan has announced the opening of Rimdan- Gabad and Pishin-Mand crossings, while Iran is to open Rimdan crossing point, located about 130 km from Chabahar port in Sistan and Baluchistan province. Both countries have decided to name the common border, “Border of Peace, Friendship, and Love”.

It is hoped that all these measures will increase the volume of trade between the two countries, which currently stands at USD 392.08 million, of which Pakistan’s exports are only 22.86 million. However, one cannot deny the fact that this trade volume can only increase if trade routes are best protected.

Apart from the prospects of economic and political improvements, the visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister has significance due to change in the American administration. During the Trump administration, the US unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018 and cruel economic sanctions not only ruined the peace of the region but also severely damaged Iran’s economic interests. Many countries, including Pakistan, postponed trade and economic agreements due to the threat of US sanctions. Thus, a gigantic gas pipeline Iran-Pakistan was deferred.

It is to be hoped that Joe Biden's policies towards the Middle East would not be lopsided, and "hateful" US attitude towards Iran would be managed, in a fair manner. Moreover, Iran will be able to play a more active role for peace in Afghanistan. It is also likely that Pakistan and Iran can work together to overcome a difficult situation in Afghanistan as these countries strongly believe that peace arrangements must be by mutual consent of the domestic political forces.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/23-Dec-2020/reappraisal-of-pakistan-iran-relations>

Pakistan's Perceived Role in Russia's GEP

By Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi

STRATEGICALLY, Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) is regarded as an important component of Moscow's foreign policy. President Putin simplified this grand strategic vision as "[being formed] on the basis of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)". Virtually, the five EAEU member states have unanimously supported the idea of pairing the EAEU development and the Chinese Silk Road Economic Belt project". Seeing as how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of BRI's flagship projects as described by Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi in November 2019, with \$13 billion worth of projects completed in January 2020. In this backdrop, it is an imperative for Moscow-Islamabad strategic engagement in order to fulfil Putin's vision of bringing the EAEU and BRI closer together to form the GEP.

Since their independence Central Asian States have acquired the attention of regional and global powers in that geographically, this region is landlocked but very rich in natural resources. Pakistan, on the other hand, lacks energy resources and therefore has remained willing to obtain benefits from these states. Importantly, Pakistan and Central Asian States have common history, religion and culture. From geostrategic point of view, Pakistan provides these regional states the shortest route to global sea trade as has been rightly pointed out," "Pakistan provides the natural link between the SCO states to connect the Eurasian heartland with the Arabian Sea and South Asia. We offer the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra-regionally and interregionally"

After the very emergence of the CARs, Islamabad moved actively into Central Asia, but policy makers were clearly divided as to what Pakistan would gain out of Central Asia. While some wanted an Islamic revolution in Central Asia, others wanted open trade links through Afghanistan. The dichotomy of views revealed the limits of Pakistan's Central Asia Policy. Moreover, during this period, the Central Asian leaders were extremely wary of Pakistan because of its involvement in the Afghan War and its support to the Mujahideen. During the Pakistan-backed Taliban era in Afghanistan, bilateral relations between Pakistan

and the Central Asian States touched rock bottom. After Pakistan joined the global war against terrorism as a frontline state, bilateral relations began to be revisited. A number of agreements have been signed covering such areas as trade and tourism, cultural and economic cooperation during these visits. Pakistan has developed institutionalised arrangements for this purpose. Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) have been established with all the Central Asian States. Under a Special Technical Assistance Programme (STAP) initiated in 1992-93, Pakistan provides training facilities, which are fully funded by Islamabad. The programme includes courses ranging from English language, banking and accountancy to diplomacy.

Likewise, Russia has also sought to sustain and expand economic ties with the former Soviet States, starting with the Customs Union Agreement in 1995. That agreement launched a long quest to establish a Russian-dominated trading zone that gradually evolved into the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Putin personally took ownership of that project from 2012. His stated goal for the EAEU was to create a Russian-led trading bloc and counterweight to the European Union (EU). In 2013, under Russian pressure, Armenia decided not to sign an already negotiated association agreement with the EU.

Russia continued its efforts to breathe life into the EAEU as it stepped up its military pressure on Ukraine. With the West imposing sanctions and curtailing contacts, it needed a diplomatic win to demonstrate that these efforts to isolate it were failing. The Kremlin thus pushed Belarus and Kazakhstan to sign the EAEU Treaty. After their respective Presidents, Alexander Lukashenko and Nursultan Nazarbayev, pushed back to strip away any hint at political integration from the draft treaty — including Russian calls for a common parliament, border force, foreign policy and currency — the treaty came into force on 01 January 2015. Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined later that same year. It appreciates to be impossible for the Central Asian States to ignore Pakistan because of its unique geostrategic position. For Turkmenistan and southern Uzbekistan, the shortest route to the sea lies through Iran, but for all other states, the shortest route is through Afghanistan and Pakistan. Karachi is the nearest port city for Central Asia and by air Islamabad is closer to Tashkent than it is to Karachi. Dushanbe is only an hour's flight from Islamabad, and by road through Afghanistan the distance from Dushanbe to Karachi is 2,720 km. In contrast, the port of Bandar Abbas is 3,400 km, Vladivostok 9,500 km and Rostov on the Don 4,200 km away. This makes Pakistan important for the CARs. Despite little success so far,

Pakistan is trying to improve its connectivity to the CARs through Afghanistan and China.

In the changing regional and global scenario, Russia and China are the two leading countries, which fit into this category of strategic management trajectory vis-a-vis Pakistan and they each realized in the 1990s and especially over the past couple of years that they would have a lot more to gain by working together than continuing their historical rivalry. Moscow has more military potential in carrying this out, while Beijing relies on the economic element of power in promoting its objectives. These two complementary sides began an unprecedented strategic convergence ever since the US simultaneously threatened their core national security interests in Ukraine and the South China Sea.

The resultant Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership has sought to pool each party's relevant resources in pushing back against the US and its allies' aggression in the best way that they're able to, which is evidenced by Moscow's anti-terrorist intervention in Syria and Beijing's ambitious globally transformative economic plans. And automatically, by detouring around the Strait of Malacca and correspondingly avoiding the ever more contentious South China Sea, CPEC strategically provides China with its most reliable maritime gateway to the Western half of the Eastern Hemisphere. And not surprisingly, that China will eventually streamline a series of high-speed railroads across mainland Eurasia through Central Asia, Russia and the Mideast in order to connect East Asia with Western Europe and completely eliminate any threat that the US Navy could ever pose to Beijing's globally transformative OBOR vision.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pakistans-perceived-role-in-russias-gep/>

Contemporary Climate Change By Dr Sahar Fazal

A warming climate is taking its toll on Earth from different perspectives. We have to wake up to this ferocious urgency of now. Humanity faces many threats, but none is bigger than climate change. In damaging our climate, we are becoming the architects of our destruction. Scientific advancement and technology from the last decades have taken the world to the next level. In the 21st century with the modernization and progress in terms of industrial revolution and technology, our planet Earth is close to the tipping point where global warming becomes irreversible. The atmosphere of the planet emits radiation due to the greenhouse effect that ultimately heat-up the surface of the planet to higher temperatures. Among those, carbon dioxide plays a significant role in this context. Recent investigations suggest that the burning of fossil fuels is the main and foremost contributor to the escalation of carbon dioxide concentration. Developed countries, such as China, the UK and some other industrially revolutionized countries are the major donors of greenhouse gas emissions. According to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an increase in the temperature of the planet will result in un-usual rainfall patterns, drought, flooding, glacial melting and some other adverse effects on the environment.

Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate impact. It is not limited to a specific area of the country but every part, city, and village are exposed to the grave danger of climate change. Its consequences for Pakistan are manifold. Recently in Karachi, we witnessed heavy, sudden, and un-usual rainfall which will ultimately affect the annual patterns of rainfall. It paralyzes the rural and urban community's mobility because of flooding and food shortage. In 2015, Karachi faced heat waves that took 1200 lives alone in Karachi and about 200 in other cities of Sindh province. In Pakistan, heat waves are common in May, June and July. Secondly, intense air pollution has been seen as smog. Smog is a mixture of smoke and fog. This air pollution is made up of nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, ozone, smoke, and other particulates. Seasonal crop burning during the switch from the Rabi harvest to Kharif sowing is responsible for the air pollution and formation of smog in Pakistan. Most of the smog formed in large cities is a result of traffic emissions. Industries are also increasing smog by releasing poisonous gases in the air. Volcanic outbreak releases high levels of sulfur dioxide in the air. During smog, it

is difficult for animals to adjust or live in such poisonous situations, which can kill many animal species or make them liable to illness.

Similarly, Pakistan also experiences glacier melting due to global warming. Pakistan has 7,253 known glaciers which are a number more than anywhere in the world except polar regions. These glaciers are a blessing for a country as they give us almost 75 % of the water supply in the country. Due to global warming, the glaciers in Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan started melting slowly and gradually causing sea-level to raise avalanches, landslides and glacial lake outburst flood. These events happened due to land-sliding and avalanches. Furthermore, recently because of glacial lake outburst Chitral experienced heavy flooding. Lastly, if an increase of temperature at the current rate continues it will result in the elevation of the level of the sea and will eventually severely affect the coastline of Pakistan. Some other adverse effects on the environment will also be seen in the long-term time era such as irreversible loss to biodiversity, severely disrupt ecosystems, desertification, food shortage, the spread of pandemics and many health-related issues and enormous hardships for communities and societies.

The COVID-19 pandemic across the world causes a global health crisis, collapsing economies, due to the strict lockdown. However, the outbreak has also fascinatingly impacted the environment. The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has been affecting global socio-economic and political activity. It causes a reduction in fossil-fuel-derived CO₂ emissions up to 17% by early April of 2020 compared with the mean 2019 levels. But, according to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, the threat of COVID-19 is short-term, meanwhile, the peril of droughts, floods and extreme storms linked to climate change will go on for years and will require persistent action. Also, Pakistan along with rising traditional security concerns of national interest should play a profitable and productive contribution in the non-traditional security like climate change for long-term benefits. In recent times the cost of the extreme weather consequences of climate change is listed at \$384 million. In the past 20 years, there has been a cost of 20 million dollars to the national economy because of the ravages of climate change.

Consequently, our attitude is what influences all our actions. Pakistan is considered to be in the zone of the most exposed country to the adverse and dangerous effects of climate change. Utmost seriousness is required in this

matter. Pakistan is keen to control these climatic changes. Planting more trees is an effective way to overcome these climatic drastic changes. In recent times, Prime Minister of Pakistan started the billion tree project in the whole country. Concerned authorities must take measures to reduce the number of diesel automobiles that release unnecessary carbon in the air. The visionary attitude of mainstream authorities and institutions is required in terms of policymaking and implementation. Moreover, climatic negotiation international legally binding instrument for cutting greenhouse gas emissions Kyoto Protocol universal legal climatic bindings should also work on practical ground rather than only focusing on black-white documentation. The future cost of the climate impact is estimated to \$6 billion to \$14 billion per year over the next 40 years. In December 2019, our Government introduced an electrical vehicle policy to combat the emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants. For this government presented the programme of Clean and Green Pakistan which is worthy recovering initiative for nature.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/contemporary-climate-change/>

Year 2020 For Pakistan and the World By

Yasmeen Aftab Ali

COVID 19 has completely changed life as we knew it for people world over. Of course since stupidity has no bounds, millions held protests against lockdowns, refused to wear masks and endangered not only themselves, but through them their loved ones. The disease saw industries closing, smaller enterprises go out of work, more and more people being laid off from work, educational institutions and organizations moving online- in short lives in decades to come stands radically changed.

As COVID 19 vaccine starts rolling out, one would like to know Pakistan government's policy is [if there exists one] not only on its procurement but also the cost per vaccine and will it be affordable for the masses or like everything else, it is for elite alone?

For countries like Pakistan the virus was a Godsend excuse to use as a cloak to hide behind resulting from lack of policies to provide easement to the common man, boost industries and production, bolster jobs and develop sound economic policies. Crushed under the weight of soaring inflation, the government has decided to hike power tariff by 25-30 percent. This means a direct impact of cost of all goods and services, putting tremendous pressure on middle class and below, putting a squeeze on consumer buying power which in return will put more production houses out of business in turn having more jobless. In turn having even lesser consumer buying power. How this will affect the law and order is a subject in itself. 'Reportedly this hike is a bid to fulfill the IMF condition.' [Dawn News December 23, 2020] The scope of pressures at hand for the world reflects the scope of tasks lying ahead.

Challenges for 2021 get more and more 'basic'. Gender equality sticks out like a sore thumb.

U.S will see Joe Biden in office in year 2021 with no luxury of a honeymoon period. He has his platter full. Does he support U.S exit from Iran Nuclear Deal or get U.S back in the deal? Antony Blinken, Senior Advisor to Biden had suggested the latter course. How does he handle China?

Relationship between U.S and China at many levels, including technological, economic, ideological areas have been at the lowest ebb.

Middle East has been and shall continue to be a focal point. Libya & Syria are limping from wounds inflicted by wars, U.S troops continue having boots on ground in Iraq opposing the Iranian backed forces. On a very, very interesting political development, Israel has formalized/normalized relations with Bahrain and UAE besides Morocco and Sudan. Jared Kushner, Senior White House adviser was onboard the first official flight from Morocco to Israel a few days ago. "In Rabat, Mr. Kushner and a delegation that included his White House team and Israeli officials met with Moroccan leaders to sign diplomatic and economic agreements between the U.S., Israel and Morocco." [The Wall Street Journal Dec. 22, 2020] As per a report, Israel is working towards normalizing relations with another Muslim country before President Trump leaves office.

Rumors that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flew to Saudi Arab's city Neom to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman were rife in November 2020 and brushed off as blatantly false by Saudi Arab. The oil rich state stands by its stance that it will only recognize Israel if the question of Palestine was addressed and resolved. Honorable though this stance is, many analysts are of the view that for the smaller Muslim states to normalize relationship with Israel was well-nigh impossible without Saudi Arab's blessings. So this raises a question: In due course of time will Pakistan be 'asked' to face this question? The biggest hesitancy arises due to a legitimate concern in certain circles that acknowledging Israel will compromise our stance on AJK. Does it? For starters, the idea of self-determination is hugely dissimilar between the two.

Palestinians were displaced from their land. Indian Occupied Kashmir was forcibly taken over without displacing the local inhabitants. Secondly, the nature of fighting in Palestine has over time gained a broader base, justifying actions by OBL for example. In IOK case, no such circumstantial or actual facts exist. Decades of struggle against Indian forces has led to thousands of forced disappearances, killings and 7000 mass graves.

What is needed is to view minutely, the dynamics of both regional situations that are dissimilar in every respect and come to a conclusion as to what should be

Pakistan's stance when [not if] faced by this situation. This must be a decision reflecting the opinion of Parliament, not the whims of one, two, three or more.

Challenges for 2021 get more and more 'basic'. Gender equality sticks out like a sore thumb. Women comprise of almost 50% of world population however are not treated as equals to their male counterparts. Equal opportunities for education and work do not often exist because of their gender. This is more pronounced in lower income groups. Sexual violence against women is unfortunately high. Cases of child rape and murders too remain high.

Scarcity of water is a point of attention. The more conflicts there are, the more the population displacements the higher becomes the unsafe water sources available to them. 'According to the Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) 2018, report by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization, 27,000 children die each year from diarrhea related diseases in Pakistan.' Provision of clean drinking water and safe sanitation remains a challenge for countries like Pakistan. Poor infrastructure is a contributing factor.

Food security is a challenge. In Pakistan the Economic Survey 2019-20 in June this year predicted 10 million more to join the 50 million living below the poverty line. The important point to be taken into consideration is that even those above poverty line or at the margin may not be getting nutritious meals. It will depend on head counts in a family unit.

Pakistan does not have any policies in place to deal with the myriad economic issues it faces. The Prime Minister of Pakistan in a recent television interview stated that the only way for the people to improve their condition is by creating wealth. He may like to go through Para 3 from above of this piece.

He further said the high energy costs had impeded industrialization which in turn affected wealth creation and poverty alleviation. [However rate of electricity is to go up 25 to 30% yet again after many repeated hikes in past two years?] – Dawn Updated 26 Nov 2020. He was Country Strategy Dialogue (CSD) on Pakistan held by the World Economic Forum virtually.

The writer is a lawyer, academic and political analyst. She has authored a book titled 'A Comparative Analysis of Media & Media Laws in Pakistan.' She can be contacted at: yasmeenali62@gmail.com and tweets at @yasmeen_9

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/705979/year-2020-for-pakistan-the-world/>

ECONOMY

RCEP: Economic Fortunes and Challenges

By Yasir Habib Khan

With economic windfalls and challenges, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is an 'Asian Economic Stride', on a global trade stage. Representing present time as well as future dynamics, it promises China, ASEAN countries, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand inclusive growth in tandem.

Raining down positive impacts, RCEP's Asian Economic Stride triggers deeper trade integration, tariff rationalisation, economic liberalisation, SMEs' revitalisation, market accessibility and a level playing field in all development spectrums. It anchors the next stages of e-commerce, entrepreneurialism, Intellectual property protection and enforcement, manpower capacity building and mammoth opportunities of employments.

The RCEP marks ASEAN's biggest free trade pact to date, covering a market of 2.2 billion people with a combined size of US\$26.2 trillion or 30% of the world's GDP. "The signing of the RCEP Agreement is a historic event as it underpins ASEAN's role in leading a multilateral trade agreement of this magnitude, despite global and regional challenges and eight years of negotiations," said Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN. "RCEP will give a much-needed boost for a swift and robust recovery for businesses and peoples in our region particularly during the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis," he added.

The deal will improve market access with tariffs and quotas eliminated in over 65% of goods traded and make business predictable with common rules of origin and transparent regulations, upon entry into force. This will encourage firms to invest more in the region, including building supply chains and services, and to generate jobs.

The objective of the RCEP Agreement is to establish a modern, comprehensive, high-quality, and mutually beneficial economic partnership that will facilitate the expansion of regional trade and investment along with contributing to global economic growth and development. Accordingly, it will bring about market and employment opportunities to businesses and people in the region. The RCEP Agreement will work alongside and support an open, inclusive, and rules-based multilateral trading system.

The agreement is not made just for today but also for tomorrow. It updates the coverage of the existing ASEAN Plus One FTAs (ASEAN's FTAs with the five dialogue partners) and takes into consideration changing and emerging trade realities, including the age of electronic commerce, the potential of micro, small and medium enterprises, the deepening regional value chain, and the complexity of market competition. It will complement the World Trade Organisation (WTO), building on the WTO's Agreement in areas where the parties have agreed to update or go beyond its provisions.

The RCEP is also comprehensive, in terms of both coverage and depth of commitments. On its coverage, the RCEP Agreement comprises of 20 Chapters and includes many areas that were not previously covered in the ASEAN Plus One FTAs. This agreement has specific provisions covering trade in goods, including rules of origin; customs procedures and trade facilitation; sanitary and phytosanitary measures; standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures; and trade remedies. It also covers trade in services including specific provisions on financial services; telecommunication services; and professional services, as well as the temporary movement of natural persons. In addition, there are chapters on investment; intellectual property; electronic commerce; competition; small and medium enterprises (SMEs); economic and technical cooperation; government procurement; and legal and institutional areas including dispute settlement. In terms of market access, the RCEP Agreement achieves liberalisation in trade in goods and services and has extended coverage to investment.

The RCEP contains provisions that go beyond the existing ASEAN Plus One FTAs, while recognising the individual and diverse levels of development and economic needs of the RCEP Parties. It addresses the issues required to support the Parties' engagement in the global and regional supply chain and complements market access commitments with trade and investment enabling

rules. It preserves legitimate public policy objectives. The RCEP Agreement strives to boost competition in a way that drives productivity, which is sustainable, responsible, and constructive. In addition, the RCEP Agreement has the added value of bringing together a single rulebook to help facilitate the development and expansion of regional supply chains among Parties.

Furthermore, it brings together countries with diverse levels of development. Thus, the RCEP Parties have recognised that its success will be determined by its ability to mutually bring benefits. The RCEP Agreement is designed to achieve this objective in a number of ways, including through appropriate forms of flexibility and provisions for special and differential treatment especially for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam, as appropriate, and additional flexibility for the least developed Parties. In addition, it also includes technical cooperation and capacity building that will be made available to support the implementation of commitments made under the RCEP Agreement and for the Parties to maximise the benefits accruing therefrom. The agreement also includes provisions that will ensure that economies with different levels of development, businesses of differing sizes, and the broader stakeholders can all benefit from the Agreement.

RCEP has realised the dream of Northeast Asian economic integration. A spokesman for Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted last year that negotiations on the trilateral China-South Korea-Japan free trade agreement, which has been stuck for many years, will become active as soon as they are able to conclude the negotiation on RCEP. Finally what dreamt came true.

As a matter of fact, in the bygone era when Asia dominated the world economy, the Eurasian continent was regionally connected by the ancient Silk Roads, the Spice Roads and the maritime silk roads travelled by caravan traders, pilgrims, craftsmen, seafarers, diplomats, artists and poets of different color hailing from a diverse array of Asian, Arabic and Mediterranean civilisations. Conversely, Asia collectively declined in cultural and economic significance when European powers rose to prominence on the world stage on the back of colonialism. As such, RCEP has made its mark in the region for free trade and connectivity underpinning Asia's centrality in the world economy.

Under the RCEP, participants are to ensure the free flow of digital information, such as contents and data, across borders. Nations will be barred from requiring

foreign companies to place servers or other equipment on their soil as a condition for conducting business. But the treaty will not ban countries from demanding the disclosure of source codes, a clause that was included in the TPP.

Officials have clearly got a focus on helping the smallest firms in RCEP benefit from the final agreement. This is a welcome development, since every country in the grouping is dominated by smaller size companies. The one area of sustained focus in RCEP that will be most promising for SMEs is e-commerce and digital trade. E-commerce and digital trade represent the fastest and easiest way for smaller firms to connect to suppliers, consumers and lead firms. Given the relatively higher levels of connectivity in Asia compared to other regions, this pathway can be developed further quickly with the right policies in place and help lead to new growth opportunities.

2020 is going to end on a positive note regarding RCEP historic agreement. However, attention is already turning to 2021, when the bloc will renew its focus on more traditional concerns, namely regional unity and outside threats that some suggest could hamper the RCEP's ultimate implementation.

Simon Baptist, global chief economist at consultancy The Economist Intelligence Unit said that RCEP, once realised, will significantly contribute to the flow of goods and services in the region, but the biggest challenge would be infrastructure development in such countries as Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar.

“Here, the BRI can play a very important role in the bloc. Without effective communication and connectivity, the RCEP cannot flourish and economic potential cannot be utilised by partner countries,” he said. “The BRI involvement in infrastructure development and enhancing the logistic capability of the region is a prerequisite for any further progress in the bloc.”

Chheang Vannarith, president of the Asian Vision Institute, a think tank in Phnom Penh, said the RCEP would provide economic impetus for regional countries to bounce back together from the economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. “It will send a clear signal that regional economic integration in Asia remains robust and vibrant although protectionism and unilateralism are on the rise in the United States and other regions,” he said.

He said the challenges lying ahead include how to convince people of the benefits deriving from the RCEP and how to empower and enable people and local small and medium-sized enterprises to fairly benefit from this regional trading arrangement.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/30-Nov-2020/rcep-economic-fortunes-and-challenges>

Focus on Economy | Editorial

AT its meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan in the chair, the economic team of the Government led by Finance Minister Dr Abdul Hafeez Sheikh, took pride in stabilizing the economy to some extent despite the highly negative impact of the Covid-19 situation. It was informed that during the current financial year the primary deficit was surplus, and there was an increase of five per cent in the FBR tax collection, 27 per cent increase in the foreign remittances, and 9.1 percent increase in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

There are, indeed, positive signs on the economic front and these augur well for the country and that is why the Prime Minister has emphasized the need for a trickle-down effect of the stability to the masses. The Government deserves credit for initiation and continuation of some of the bitter economic and fiscal measures which had political repercussions for an elected government and these have started yielding fruits. Substantial increase in foreign remittances by Overseas Pakistanis and the policy of discouraging unnecessary imports are apparently the main contributors to improvement in the economic conditions. It is rightly said that the country created history with over \$2 billion worth of workers' remittances for the sixth consecutive month in November, which helped it continue to meet its international payment obligations. As per State Bank of Pakistan, persistent efforts by the government and central bank to bring remittances under the Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI) and rising use of digital channels amid limited cross-border travel were some of the important factors behind the sustained improvement in workers' remittances. However, it is also a fact that incentives provided to the industry and the construction sectors have also helped stimulate the otherwise stumbling economy. There has been a substantial increase in production of cars, which is important in the backdrop of the pressure the industry witnessed during Covid-19 forcing it to lay off staff and the increase in production would serve as a positive message for more companies to invest in the sector. The economic activity is expected to take a quantum jump when all the planned projects under the umbrella of the construction package reach the implementation stage providing job opportunities to thousands. At long last, there is also a ray of hope that the authorities would be able to tackle the menace of rising inflation as prices of wheat and sugar have already started declining after the arrival of imported commodities. However, as

pointed out by the Prime Minister himself, trickle-down effect should be visible as people have suffered a lot and deserve immediate relief in multiple ways.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/focus-on-economy/>

Global Markets Are Partying Like It Is 2008 **(But a Crash Is Coming) By Desmond** **Lachman**

After the 2008 U.S. housing and credit market crisis, Chuck Prince, the former Citibank CEO, explained his bank's speculative activity during the bubble by noting that when the music is playing you have to dance. Today, with the world's major central banks continuing to supply the markets with ample liquidity, there can be little doubt that the music is blaring and the markets are dancing.

In late 2008, at a meeting with academics at the London School of Economics, Queen Elizabeth II asked why no one seemed to have anticipated the world's worst financial crisis in the postwar period. The so-called Great Economic Recession, which had begun in late 2008 and would run until mid-2009, was set off by the sudden collapse of sky-high prices for housing and other assets—something that is obvious in retrospect but that, nevertheless, no one seemed to see coming.

It would seem all too likely that now we are about to make the same mistake by being too sanguine about today's asset and credit market bubbles.

Certainly, the U.S. and global economies have snapped back well from the depths of the coronavirus economic recession. It is also beyond doubt that effective vaccines have been developed and are now being distributed. However, as the Bank for International Settlements keeps warning us, global asset and credit market prices have once again risen well above their underlying value—in other words, they are in bubble territory. In addition, as our health experts keep warning us, we still have to get through a dark coronavirus winter before a sufficient part of the population has been vaccinated to allow a return to economic normality.

Considering the virtual silence among economists about the danger today's bubbles pose and about the risk of another leg down in the global economy, one has to wonder whether in a year or two, when the bubbles eventually do burst, the queen will not be asking the same sort of question.

This silence is all the more surprising considering how much more pervasive bubbles are now and how much more indebted the world economy is today than it was twelve years ago. While in 2008, the bubbles were largely confined to the American housing and credit markets, they are now to be found in almost every corner of the world economy. Indeed, U.S. stock market valuations today are reminiscent of those preceding the 1929 market crash while countries with major solvency problems like Italy, Spain, and Portugal all find themselves able to borrow at zero interest rates.

Equally troubling has been the tremendous debt build-up around the world. Even before the pandemic struck, many years of cheap money had caused global debt levels to rise above their pre-September 2008 Lehman bankruptcy levels. After the pandemic, global debt levels have skyrocketed ever higher as budget deficits have ballooned and as corporations have been forced to go on a borrowing binge.

A particular area of concern has to be the emerging market economies, which now account for around half of the world economy and which have been hit by a perfect economic storm of pandemic related disruptions, low international commodity prices, and weak external demand for their exports. This has left those economies with record high debt levels and unusually high budget deficits. This is now prompting the World Bank to predict that it is only a matter of time before we see a wave of emerging market debt defaults and restructurings that could have important implications for the global financial system.

The very highly indebted and systemically important Southern European countries like Italy and Spain also have to be a source of concern. Those economies now have higher debt levels and very much higher budget deficits than they did at the time of the 2010 European sovereign debt crisis. As before, stuck within a Euro straitjacket, they will have the greatest of difficulties in reducing their budget deficits and restoring any semblance of public debt sustainability. This would seem to be setting us up for another European sovereign debt crisis.

Closer to home, New York University bankruptcy expert Ed Altman is warning of a looming spike in U.S. small and medium-sized bankruptcies in the wake of the

pandemic. Meanwhile, Janet Yellen has long been warning of over-indebtedness in the highly leveraged debt market.

After the 2008 U.S. housing and credit market crisis, Chuck Prince, the former Citibank CEO, explained his bank's speculative activity during the bubble by noting that when the music is playing you have to dance. Today, with the world's major central banks continuing to supply the markets with ample liquidity, there can be little doubt that the music is blaring and the markets are dancing.

The question that nobody seems to be asking is what happens when the music stops playing? This is likely to leave a lot of explaining to Queen Elizabeth when the music does stop and nobody will have warned her of the crash that will almost surely follow the party's end.

Desmond Lachman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He was formerly a deputy director in the International Monetary Fund's Policy Development and Review Department and the chief emerging market economic strategist at Salomon Smith Barney.

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/global-markets-are-partying-it-2008-crash-coming-174573>

Pak-Iran New Border Gateway | Editorial

IN a significant move likely to bolster business and trade relations between the two neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Iran on Saturday opened a new border crossing point. The Rimdan-Gabd border gateway was officially opened in the presence of officials from both sides, which is all set to lessen burden on Mirjavah-Taftan crossing point.

The new crossing point is suitably located for import and export of goods between the two countries. During Iranian Foreign Minister Jawad Zarif's visit to Islamabad in November both sides had reached an understanding to open this crossing point to facilitate trade. Both the countries share 959-km border and have in recent years held interactions at various levels to enhance their bilateral relations in diverse fields. Geographical proximity and close brotherly ties rooted in historical, cultural and religious commonalities offer huge potential to take bilateral relationship to new heights for the benefit of peoples of two countries. Though trade between the two countries is growing gradually, it is less than the actual potential. Business communities of the two countries should be encouraged so that they can play their due role to strengthen trade and economic ties. And indeed opening new crossing points on the border is a step in the right direction to achieve that purpose.

Abundant opportunities are available in Iranian dairy, livestock, meat and beverages sectors for Pakistani traders and investors. Similarly, Pakistan can also benefit from Iran's energy and petrochemical sector. The new crossing point will also facilitate hundreds of thousands of Pakistani Zaireen who visit Iran every year. At present pilgrims had to travel to Taftan from Quetta and on their return from Iran to Quetta amid heavy security. We will rather ask both the countries to deliberate on opening of more border crossing points and then move towards establishment of border markets to provide a real impetus to economic relations. Simultaneously, the two countries must make joint efforts to curb border smuggling cutting down illicit and undocumented trade, movement of undesirable elements that create mistrust in bilateral relations. With India out of Chabahar Port project and China stepping in, prospects are high of Tehran joining the CPEC project. This will be a win-win situation for the three countries. Both Gwadar Deep Sea Port and Chabahar will supplement each other to make the region hub of trade.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pak-iran-new-border-gateway/>

Demand For E-commerce in Pakistan By Dr Nosharwan A Abbasi

E-commerce and other online businesses have been demanding access to online payments gateways and permission to introduce foreign companies to operate in Pakistan for a long time. Global tech giants are either reluctant to enter Pakistan market or they are discouraged due to government policies. However, major hindrance can't be figured out as ministers repeatedly promised to allow overseas companies to operate locally but not a single company got permission. Similarly, freelancers and tech companies have long been demanding to allow a major payment platform "PayPal" due to payment challenges locally and from overseas clients. In recent shout-out, a major discourse started on Twitter with hashtag #AmazonInPakistan. It started trending when Pakistani users started demanding amazon operations in Pakistan as it's a popular e-commerce platform globally. However, owing to government policies, Amazon remains reluctant to start business in Pakistan. Pakistan can be a major market for Amazon or a similar e-commerce platform.

Previously similar campaigns were launched by people on social networks to demand the operation of global tech companies in Pakistan. Waqar Zaka, a famous reality show host has filed several petitions in Sindh High Court to legalize cryptocurrency. He also filed petitions to lift ban on a famous game and similarly raised his voice when a video publishing app was banned. Asad Umar, the then Finance Minister and Fawad Chowdary mentioned about welcoming Pay Pal and crypto currency but it just reminded a political promise or statement. Initially it was mentioned that State Bank has banned cryptocurrency and it is believed that its illegal. However, recently the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) published a paper discussing cryptocurrency regulation in the country. Meanwhile, the Central Bank has reportedly confirmed that there is no cryptocurrency ban. Such ambiguous situations and comments from different departments show that there are no definite regulations related to the latest technology innovations. Twitter users in Pakistan have been discussing such tech related issues in Pakistan and different hashtags appeared trending in different times such as #unbancryptocurrency #PayPalInPakistan #AmazonInPakistan #UnBanTikTok #UnBanPUBG etc. Thousands of tweets stormed to discuss these issues and twitter users in Pakistan got these issues

trending on Twitter. It's clear that people want Amazon to start in Pakistan and they are requesting its CEO Jeff Bezos to launch service in the country. Amazon is currently operating in 16 countries including India where they have invested \$1bn.

During COVID-19, e-commerce and the digital economy has received a huge sales boost as physical mobility of shoppers has remained limited. Despite limited available options people started using digital products which has increased contribution of the tech sector in boosting the country's economy. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) claims that the shift to electronic payments would stimulate consumption and trade, helping the country's economy by as much as 7%, creating four million jobs and boosting gross domestic product (GDP) by \$36 billion by 2025, the report added. There are several challenges for existing e-commerce in Pakistan including logistics issues, quality assurance and payment gateways issues. Most users have to rely on cash on delivery options which is not suitable for e-commerce business. Payment gateway could solve this issue and cash on delivery option can be eliminated, however, online payment gateways are facing challenges to operate in Pakistan. On one hand the government is emphasizing on increasing the digital economy and support tech industry to bring in more revenue to country's economy but on the other side government is not ready to solve problems. Government imposed a 6% tax on online generated revenue in 2019, while recently in 2020 15% tax was imposed on online earnings with over \$400 monthly income. The decision comes as a surprise to most in the freelancing community although it is not unexpected as the FBR had been sending tax notices to content creators like and YouTubers and Nadir Ali in the past. The decision seems somewhat unfair as \$400 dollar annual limit is barely enough for the expenses that are incurred and the effort that goes into content creation.

Government has to take digital economy seriously in order to increase revenue and attract foreign investment in Pakistan. Tech giants such as Google, Facebook, Apple, Amazon are bringing huge investment to India and making local products. Similarly, China's tech giants Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent are leading Chinese investors to invest in India. Smartphone companies both Chinese and global players such as Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, Oppo have been directly investing in India and moving their assembly line to India. While in Pakistan all these tech giants are reluctant to invest and start local business owing to political uncertainty and lack of policy. It is the need of the hour to create an investor-

friendly environment so that global technology players can invest in Pakistan. China's e-commerce giant Alibaba's revenue in 2020 was \$72 bn, similarly Amazon revenue was 280 bn in 2019. These companies are adding a huge amount of revenue in the country's economy while creating millions of jobs in different countries. These numbers prove that digital economy is becoming a major contributor to the country's overall economic situation. Pakistan is ignoring major contributors to the economy, while public clearly demands ease of business for e-commerce and other tech companies. It will not only bring overseas investment to Pakistan but also create large employment opportunities.

—The writer is PhD from Communication University of China and Lecturer at NUML Islamabad.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/demand-for-e-commerce-in-pakistan/>

Debt Relief | Editorial

As part of the larger Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) to help neutralise the economic hardships brought upon by the pandemic, another installment of \$526 million was rescheduled for Pakistan by the G-20 club. This has resulted in an overall debt relief worth \$1.7 billion for the country. It is imperative that we take this opportunity and make the most of it by focusing our efforts on revitalising the economy.

The debt rescheduling agreements were made on Monday with France, China and Switzerland by the Economic Affairs Division of the respective countries. This should bode well for the country considering that our exports have experienced a steady incline for the past few months. In fact, November showed an increase of 7.67 percent, \$2.161 billion, in foreign revenue through the export of commodities like textiles. Furthermore, the potential of trade is expected to increase especially when taking into account the prospective market in China—worth \$23 billion to be exact. Securing even one percent of this market would require the country to focus on exporting raw materials and intermediate goods to the neighbour. As the government works on targeting newer markets, and reinvigorating existing ones, the country's economic environment might be on the path to recovery.

Debt suspension has been one of the good things to come as a result of the pandemic and it is vital that the government does not take this for granted. Enormous pressure has been lifted off of the economy and now we are in a position where we can invest in our strengths and capitalise on them so as to be in a stable position in the future when we will have to return the debt.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/23-Dec-2020/debt-relief>

Current Account Surplus | Editorial

The monthly streak of year-on-year surplus in the current account continues, in a sign of sustained, gradual economic recovery that could lead to economic stabilisation in line with the IMF programme. Pakistan's current account balance posted a surplus — of \$447 million — for the fifth consecutive month in November as compared to a deficit of \$326m during the same time last year, according to the data released by SBP on Tuesday. On a cumulative basis, the total current account balance during the first five months of the ongoing fiscal year i.e. FY21 registered a record surplus of \$1.64 billion against a deficit of \$1.745 billion during the same period in the previous fiscal year.

The continued surplus in the current account from July to November 2020 has led to the central bank's foreign exchange reserves rising by around \$1 billion in November 2020 — currently standing at a three-year high of \$13.1 billion. However, this consistency in the current account surplus is mainly caused by the rise in remittances from abroad which have jumped 27% to \$11.77 billion during the five months under review. And this rise in remittances has resulted from the Covid-related travel restrictions that have driven increased flows through legal channels.

Apart from boosting remittances, the raging pandemic has also benefited Pakistan's exports which have contributed to the current rise in inflows. As much of the world is shut due to Covid-19, Pakistani manufactures are getting far more than normal export orders, especially in the textile sector. However, it is expected that with the beginning of the anti-Covid vaccination process, things will start normalising the world over and the local economy will also open up — something that is likely to take back the remittances and export proceeds to the normal level, and the much-celebrated surplus in the current account may therefore vanish. The government needs to stay prepared beforehand.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 24th, 2020.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2277148/current-accou-surplus>

State of the Economy | Editorial

The Ministry of Finance and the finance minister have expressed confidence that the economy – hit by a balance of payments crisis, as well as the Covid pandemic – may be recovering. To prove his point, Finance Minister Hafeez Sheikh has pointed to the growth in the current account and the surplus seen in it as well as an improvement in manufacturing and the growth of larger manufacturing units over the past year. This obviously is good news for Pakistan. But at the same time, we need to consider the matter a little more carefully. In the first place, Pakistan remains under the tight control of the IMF, given the loan it has taken from the body and the conditionalities under which this was done. The situation means the country has very little margin within which to move, and less scope to give any kind of relief to people suffering as a result of the pandemic and the joblessness, the closure of industry etc. The IMF may need to be convinced to run more welfare packages at the moment rather than focus only on the overall financial account of the country.

It is also true that, while the current account is in surplus for the first time in many years, the overall finance account of the country is in deficit. There is also an agricultural crisis, with Pakistan forced to import items it once exported, including wheat and sugar. This is not good news for a country largely dependent on its agricultural produce. At the same time, the growth in manufacturing that we have seen has come mainly in a few primary sectors, including textiles. Analysts suggest that one of the reasons for this growth may be the collapse of the Indian manufacturing sector as a result of the coronavirus. This gap in the provision of textile supplies from India has meant Pakistan can move into the space that has opened up. But the focus must be on retaining this hold after the Covid-19 crisis is over. Whether Pakistan can do this is something that will have to be looked at with some care.

At the same time, there's also the issue of tax collection. While prices have gone up, and taxation, especially indirect taxation, has risen sharply, this is not reflected in the collections made by the FBR. Quite clearly, the country needs the resources in order to manage its economy and find the money it requires to benefit people. The improvements in the various economic sectors are excellent news, but alone they're not sufficient. And the overall picture also needs to be taken into account when making any kind of assessment.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/764356-state-of-the-economy>

EDUCATION

Distance Education and Policy By **Muhammad Zaman**

DISTANCE education is the only valid currency in the world after the Covid-19 but Pakistan's distance education policy is not available and Higher Education Commission's policy is flimsy and fragile. Distance education including its virtual mode is becoming popular in the world. Almost every country has opted the distance and online classes and adopted the virtual pedagogy after the outbreak of the coronavirus remember days when I was applying for a teaching job back in 2009 in Canada and I saw an advertisement about the recruitment of a sociology online lecturer. I was skeptic and thought how it was possible to give a lecture online where there is no student and no human being present in front of a teacher. It was a boring to teach online and I drop the idea to apply for the post. However, today everyone of us is compelled to teach online. The world has realized this need back in the 19th (The University of South Africa established in 1873) and 20th century (The Open University, UK established in 1969) and Pakistan established Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in 1974.

The Open University, UK and Open University of Catalonia are often ranked in the top 500 universities of the world. Even India started distance education in 1962 and established a Distance Education Bureau in 2013. It was misperceived that distance learning degrees were inferior as compared to physically learnt degrees. However, highly advanced countries like the UK, US, Canada and Japan are offering distance/ online degrees and it will be one of the popular modes in future. Thus, distance education became a specialized and separate field as medical, engineering, social sciences and IT are established a separate field. However, Pakistan still does not have any policy or body to establish, regulate and monitor the distance education in the country. The purpose of the distance education was to cater to the needs of those students who cannot attend the classes physically and learn from the books and distance tutors but now it became the global need with new realities of life like coronavirus. Now distance education is almost in every discipline.

Pakistan has a very few brilliant educationists or experienced professionals who have experience in the distance learning, pedagogical and leadership skills but they are hardly on the position to materialize the distance education. Medical and engineering are specialized fields but they are limited to their own fields. We hardly see anywhere else in the developed world where they were making policies for the distance education. This kind of state of affairs could hurdle the distance learning and pedagogical illusions to the millions of the students. Engineering professionals may be relevant to provide mode of learning, but do they have adequate vision, experience and relevant skills in the distance education? The distance educationist or academician could better understand the scope and mode than the medical and engineering professionals. Meanwhile, these professionals can be helpful to design a mode, but they could not provide the education policy. This is the field of a distance educationist. They may be given a chance to first formulate a distance/online education policy, manage and then lead the distance educational institutions. They can provide a vision, leadership, innovation and discovery in the distance learning. This is right time to give distance educationists a space to formulate a policy and then give them a chance to manage, lead and run those institutions.

Currently, two universities of Pakistan: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad and Virtual University (VU) are providing distance learning. They are providing distance and online education to the students of the remote areas with nominal charges. However, all of the traditional/general universities are compelled to provide online education. These universities are without proper training, skills, infrastructure, online connectivity and inadequate examination system. This could be done with the assistance distance learning professionals who may share experience of distance/online learning material, mode, skills, evaluation and socialization. This is beyond the approach to just provide a mode of learning with IT skills. Therefore, the Government of Pakistan should realize the need of the distance/ online learning and formulate and declare distance education a specialized field. Government of Pakistan should formulate a board under the leadership of the distance learning educationists in order to promote this specialized field. This board may also include the experts from IT, social, natural, biological, medical and engineering fields to formulate a policy. They should formulate vision, mission and objectives of learning and pedagogical skills for every field starting from the primary, secondary and tertiary education including vocational trainings through distance and online learning. Meanwhile,

this policy should not be short sighted but it should cater the needs of decades if not a century. Covid-19 outbreak may be an early warning to avoid the more dangerous viruses. Therefore, education policy response may be faster, reliable, smart and adequate. Pakistan must realize to formulate distance education policy and implement in timely manner and fashion so that the future generation can be served effectively.

—The writer is Chairman, Department of Sociology at Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/distance-education-and-policy/>

Education; A Constitutional Right By

Shahrukh Mehboob

The present system of education prevalent in Pakistan is the heritage of the pre-partitioned British India. A review of the education system of Pakistan suggests that there has been little change in Pakistan's schools since 2010 when the 18th Amendment enshrined education as a fundamental human right in the constitution under Article 25A of the constitution of Pakistan 1973. Problems of access, quality, infrastructure and inequality of opportunity remain endemic. According to the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), the Federal Government was entrusted with the responsibility for policy, planning, and promotion of educational facilities in the federating units. This responsibility was in addition to the overall policymaking, coordinating, and advisory authority; otherwise, education was the concurrent subject. The Federal Ministry of Education also administers the educational institutions located in the federal capital territory.

Education is a child's basic right. Even in times of conflict, war, or disaster, temporary learning opportunities are set up as part of emergency relief to provide continued learning support. In Pakistan, the public policies on education reflect the National ideology. It consists of the political option, tradition, values, culture, and socio-economic needs, emerging trends, and concepts, and even its implications in the future. Pakistan has an estimated 22.8 million children from five to 16 outside school. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and consequent educational institution closures have resulted in millions more deprived of learning opportunities.

Our current education system can be depicted from a short scene, in which the protagonist takes up the stage, the audience gets settled, and becomes quiet. The protagonist assumes his position and starts delivering a monologue facing the audience. The audience believes what they watch, agree to what they hear, and learn from whatever perception the protagonist holds. The scene ends, the protagonist leaves the stage for the next to come and the audience imbibes all the preaching of the protagonist's monologue without stirring their comprehension level and standards." This is not an opening scene of Shakespeare's play, but it is a scene from every classroom in most of our educational institutions where a teacher like a protagonist comes and inculcates

his concepts and perspectives into the minds of the audience, his students, who absorb all the lecture without trying to comprehend or analyse it. Our curriculum is designed only as exam-oriented ignoring the fundamental aims of education. The disparity in education in Pakistan rears its ugly head again as millions of students face learning losses. Major barriers like the digital divide and the weakness of education systems threaten to increase further the vastly unequal learning opportunities available to the economically, geographically, or politically disadvantaged.

Currently, the decision of closing all educational institutions due to the second wave of COVID-19 has raised many questions regarding the future of the young generation. Maximising access through alternative learning options is essential during the crisis, the quality of content and diversity of mediums will be the deciding factor for learning outcomes or engagement. Another important factor is support at home. In economically disadvantaged segments, most parents lack basic skills, time, or interest to help their children learn at home. Our education systems often do not equip a child with skills like time management or independent learning. Mass parent awareness campaigns may improve the outcome of alternate learning options by providing support at home.

However, we have to admit that millions of children in this country will not have access to any learning in this period. To prevent these children from greater learning losses we must prepare for the challenges when schools resume. We must take help from those with the expertise to design accelerated learning programs to support students left behind and create strategies to reintegrate dropouts. We must design training programmes for teachers to give them the confidence to meet the needs of learners.

To come out of this pandemic stronger, we have to engage in discussions that go beyond the educational budget and school enrolment numbers. We must take into account the disparities that rob young children from marginalised communities of their right to education. It is time to open our eyes and understand that without quality education for all, we as a nation will always lag, regardless of the 'potential' we may have.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/13-Dec-2020/education-a-constitutional-right>

WORLD

Iran-US Tensions | Editorial

The assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an Iranian nuclear scientist, near Tehran on Friday, will inevitably spell bad news for regional peace and Iran-American relations. Fakhrizadeh, who headed research and innovation at Iran's Defense Ministry, had already been noted by American and Israeli investigation agencies as being an important contributor to the alleged covert atomic bomb programme by Iran. Despite Iran's denial that it is developing its nuclear programme, and an alleged fatwa by the Ayatullah against nuclear weapons, the West suspects Iran of seeking a coordinated nuclear weapons programme. Fakhrizadeh had also especially been named by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2018 as a threat.

Though no country has taken responsibility for this, with the above facts, one cannot blame Iran for suspecting Israeli involvement behind the attacks. The lack of denial on Israel's and the silence from the US administration makes relations even more hostile. This is a pity; the victory of Joe Biden in the US 2020 presidential elections could have been a turning point in the US-Iran relations. The Trump administration had taken hostilities to the worst they had been in decades, to the point of rumours of war.

Unfortunately, it seems that in its last few months, the Trump Administration is still determined to damage Iran-US relations to the point of no repair. Even with a Biden victory, and Biden's stated plans to renegotiate the Iran deal, these last-minute attacks will make that much more difficult- putting the Biden administration in a worse negotiating position.

Despite the current administration's best efforts, it is hoped that these futile attacks are put to an end soon and the sanctions on Iran are slowly loosened with a Biden administration. Not just for regional peace but a sanction less Iran is important for Pakistan to map out a path for regional development, along with China.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/30-Nov-2020/iran-us-tensions>

Joe Biden and the Afghan Conundrum By

Inam Ul Haque

The longest conflict in the United States' military history, in Afghanistan, is in its 20th year with no end in sight. Joe Biden's administration promises an institutional approach towards this decades-old US military involvement. As cited previously, the president-elect has supported and opposed US foreign military interventions. While supporting overseas employment of forces, he favours a lighter footprint and narrow objectives disliking nation-building. Opposed to unilateralism, Biden has preferred working through diplomacy, alliances and international institutions. He is an advocate of the "counterterrorism plus" strategy; using small Special Forces teams under an agile air cover to fight terrorists abroad.

It would be interesting to see how the above operative framework resolves the Afghan conundrum especially in the backdrop of US domestic politics, the US-Taliban peace deal, the shenanigans of Ashraf Ghani and his cabal and the interests of regional players.

Firstly, the US domestic politics. On August 21, 2017, President Trump outlined his Afghanistan policy. He promised an open-ended military commitment shifting to a 'conditions-based' withdrawal rather than a 'time-based' approach to prevent recurrence of "a vacuum for terrorists". He promised to loosen rules of engagement that subsequently caused civilian casualties. He invited India for a greater role in Afghanistan rebuilding and rebuked Pakistan for harbouring militants. Ironically, after rejecting a political settlement with the Taliban initially, he eventually signed the truce deal with them this February.

Afghan officials remain apprehensive that Americans are tired of the war as the issue never surfaced during presidential debates. Biden is on record to profess ending "forever wars" as he wrote in Foreign Affairs earlier this year. As vice-president, Mr Biden opposed the Obama era 'surge' (2009), citing the political unsustainability of the Afghan conflict. He may, therefore, keep a truncated counterterrorism contingent of around 2,000 troops (NATO has some 7,000 troops); the much touted 'orderly and condition-based withdrawal' notwithstanding. President Trump has already ordered to halve the current 4,500

US force levels by end of January 2021, fulfilling his campaign promise and in keeping with the aspirations of his base that comprises a sizeable number of veterans.

Secondly, the US-Taliban peace deal. This agreement is under stress not because of the Taliban but because too many in the US-Afghan camp want it to fail. There is no agreement on the mechanism and agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha that was to decide power-sharing and lead towards a durable ceasefire after an initial reduction in violence. The Taliban, contrary to Western/Afghan government iterations, would not concede a ceasefire without a clear, irreversible and pragmatic power-sharing arrangement that reflects realities on the battlefield. Issues like the Afghan Constitution, women/minority rights, etc. for them are ignorable niceties for another time.

Thirdly, Ghani officials want Mr Biden to pressure the Taliban to proffer protection guarantees to them, as articulated by Afghanistan's Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh. In collaboration with some US officials and the Washington Beltway community of defence contractors, they argue that a near complete withdrawal of US forces would precipitate NATO forces to also leave, besides sharp reduction in the US/other international civilian presence drying up external economic and security assistance to Afghanistan.

They contend; the Kabul regime will lose influence and legitimacy and power would move from the Centre to the periphery causing re-emergence of regional militias and local warlords. This — they think — may result in regional players supporting rival claimants to power; and the Taliban would lose interest in negotiating peace. Afghanistan — they argue — may likely descend into a wider civil war, if the Taliban take over and control over territory is contested. In this scenario, civilian deaths and refugee flows would sharply rise. This line of thinking suggests, groups including Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) would be the ultimate beneficiaries... in a full turn of events.

All these fears, including the drying up of international assistance, are ill-founded as the Taliban, even now, control most of the rural territory, run a shadow government, collect taxes, dominate the night and are a bulwark against the IS; as demonstrated by their successful operations in March 2020 to dislodge the IS from Kunar and surrounding areas. And if over 150,000 troops from some 50 most powerful countries (2011) for over two decades could not stabilise

Afghanistan; a handful of around 2,000 troops can hardly make an impression. And the regime in Kabul stands on artificial and temporary moorings as president-elect is in no mood to extend a blank cheque and blanket cover towards it any more.

Mr Biden knows Afghanistan, visiting it numerous times as senator nurturing friendships and chasms. He and President Ghani have long been friendly, but Biden has a history of tension with other important Afghan leaders like former president Hamid Karzai.

Lastly, the Afghan neighbourhood. Afghanistan is poor and weak, with rather richer and more powerful neighbours, affected by civil strife in Afghanistan. However, the US is at loggerheads with most-important Afghan neighbours and other regional powers, once supportive of the American-led intervention and consequent political dispensation in Kabul. Almost all US aid to Pakistan has dried up; Iran is heavily sanctioned and in a state of a quasi-war after the brazen killing of its nuclear scientist; Russia is under mounting American sanctions; and America is in a trade war with China.

In the foreseeable scenario, Pakistan would and should hedge its bets by becoming more open in backing the Taliban... the apparent successors to power. PM Imran Khan's recent journey to Kabul is considered ill-advised and ill-timed. Ghani stands on foreign legs and would be swept away by Taliban tidal waves in a matter of time. Secondly, even if the trip was to be taken, the PM should have waited for the new US administration to take over and enunciate its position.

Since 2001, Russia and Iran have generally remained supportive of the Kabul government, however, in recent years, they too have provided limited aid to the Taliban as a hedge. Both these countries along with India and Uzbekistan have a history of supporting Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara warlords. China is also maintaining robust links with the Taliban. Even Afghan politicians seek Taliban patronage as a hedge.

So president-elect Biden will deal with a knotty Afghanistan. US domestic compulsions, Covid-ravaged economy, peace with the Taliban, an irate Ghani and curtailed leverages with regional players will throw seemingly intractable challenges at him. In all this, Zalmay Khalilzad may keep his job.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2274390/joe-biden-and-the-afghan-conundrum>

Russia-China Interests in Afghanistan By

Abdul Shakoor Shah

AS the great powers deepen their presence in South Asia, all eyes are on Afghanistan. The two major powers are Russia and China. Both have their own interests in Afghanistan, actually the US presence in the region and the US-India ties and security anticipations have compelled the Asian giants to step into Afghan doldrums. Chinese interests in Afghanistan comprise five chief categories: the CPEC, their unease with Afghanistan's proximity to the Xinjiang province, the US presence in the region, the US-Indian ties disturbing the regional balance of power and security of its interests in the Middle East. An unhinged Afghanistan will unenthusiastically impinge on CPEC. Therefore, the Chinese have planned to include Afghanistan in the CPEC in future to protect their interests. It will not only alleviate Chinese concerns over CPEC due to unstable Afghanistan but it will also pave China's way to Iran, Middle East and less likely to India in future. China is leaping into Afghanistan in its larger geopolitical and economic context. Chinese involvement in Afghanistan aims to prevent possible spill-over into CPEC and its own borders. China is taking interest in Afghanistan very cautiously keeping in mind if the situation takes a complete turnabout, there will be a window to jump out.

China's role as a facilitator between Pak-Afghan talks is also very tactful to utilize Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan in its favor for tackling possible challenges to its soil and security from Afghanistan. For China, Afghanistan is a hallway between Pakistan and Iran. China was looking forward to Pakistan's eye role in the US-Taliban negotiation, which has proved successful. Pak-China as being all weather friends, will provide a sure chance for China to extend its new model of international development. Along with geopolitical and strategic interests, there is major Chinese economic interest in Afghanistan. Chinese companies have been vigilantly inspecting the natural assets in Afghanistan which are projected at \$1 trillion. In 2007, a deal worth \$3.4 billion (30-year lease) was signed between Afghanistan and two Chinese state owned companies—China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Company Limited (JLC)—to mine copper in Aynak Copper mine in the eastern region of Afghanistan, the world's second-largest copper deposit. The state of Afghanistan has a lot to offer China in terms of natural resources, connections and international attention, the road to

certain business hubs of Asia, its strategic significance and boost to Chain's BRT. Afghan affair will strengthen Chain's ambition of regional influence. China's extended interest in Afghanistan was observed in 2014-15 when a special envoy was appointed for the first time by China for peace process and reconciliations. China's Afghan involvement is also due to rising Uyghur secessionism in the western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region bordering Azad Jammu Kashmir and Afghanistan, and is anxious about the explosion of rising extremism from the Afghan-Pakistan border into the fidgety Xinjiang. An unstable Afghanistan will result in security implications for BRT and Xinjiang because the reports reveal links of Xinjiang problem and Taliban.

China prefers it to be a part of stable Afghanistan to avoid likely uneven situations. That is why China offered military assistance of more than \$70 million to Kabul between 2016-18. China has also aided Afghanistan in constructing the Wakhan Corridor. Unlike Russian, China has a smooth chance in Afghanistan with no invasion history. In the near future, Beijing is likely to be the second most important external factor after Pakistan through its infrastructure, military assistance and expansion of soft power in Afghanistan. Chinese factor has shrunk India-Kabul road. China's expanding influence in the region has compelled India to stop hesitating military alliances with the US, Japan and Australia. The US-Indian ties are to stop Chinese influence. Indian foot-prints in Afghanistan are due to the US' presence in Afghanistan. China will push India out of Afghanistan by including it in the CPEC. Russian has also positioned itself as a mediator for Afghanistan stability by inviting the Taliban to Moscow which frustrated the US. Moscow-Taliban meeting aimed to map out the US withdrawal from the region. Russia is concerned about Central Asian stability, it is also aware of the fact that the US decamping Afghanistan will create a security vacuum in the region. Russia is focusing to protect regional trade and exercise a greater influence in Central Asia. Russia wants to strengthen collaboration with Central Asian states. Russia is not concerned with its strategic interests in regard to Afghan affairs rather to the presence of external forces.

Russian interests in Afghanistan are of contradictory nature, on one hand it wants departure of foreign military while on the other hand the US presence in Afghanistan provides it a chance to turn heed from security issues and focus on other targets. Russia has been tactically assisting the Taliban to make ground difficult for the US and NATO allies relatively at little cost. The second purpose is to Washington in other conflicts by engaging in Afghan doldrums. Moscow is also

aiming at taking revenge for its defeat in Afghanistan which was triggered by the US. Russian involvement in Afghanistan will surely damage the US and NATO's reputation and will stop their willingness to engage in any future out-of-area operation. These both will be tremendous victories of USSR. Russia is playing a dramatic and tactful role in Afghanistan by supporting Commanders as it has realized that a stable Afghan is a better choice for it than the two evils namely the US and Taliban. Russians have supported northern commanders to stop Taliban's influence into Central Asia rather than attacking Afghan and international forces. Russian assistance to commanders does not mean that the USSR aspires to see the Taliban entirely victorious rather it aims to look for a state like the US desires. Russia wants a stable Afghanistan with inclusive government after the US exit

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Muslims in India | Editorial

IT has been 28 years since frenzied Hindu mobs tore down the Mughal-era Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. That sad event was a bellwether, signifying the horrors to come as the demon of Hindutva was unleashed to tear into the vitals of Indian secularism. Indeed, those that had taken part in that orgy of hate and violence are now controlling the levers of state in India, which bodes ill for minorities living in that country, particularly its Muslims. While Hindutva was once a fringe movement, with the Sangh Parivar linked to M.K. Gandhi's assassination, today it dictates state policy, with the prime minister of India and other high officials proudly flaunting their association with the Sangh.

Considering the dangerous direction India has taken, the Foreign Office has rightly highlighted the need for New Delhi to protect minorities, especially Muslims, who are vulnerable thanks to the shock troopers of the Sangh, who make a mockery of the law, and worse still, formulate laws that enshrine bigotry and discrimination. In a statement, the FO recalled that the destruction of the Babri Masjid was a "blatant violation of religious and international norms", while adding that in today's India, Muslims were being "systematically demonised, dispossessed, marginalised".

Indeed, the trajectory from the mosque's desecration to the rapid spread of Hindutva is a frightening one. In nearly three decades the Sangh Parivar has gone from a conglomerate of rabid extremist groups to becoming the ideological mother ship of India's ruling clique. Nehruvian secularism is dead, replaced by a muscular Hindutva that seeks to push India's minorities to the margins, preferably purging the rashtra of all 'alien' influences. The lynchings of Muslims on suspicions of consuming beef, laws designed to disenfranchise Indian Muslim citizens by having to 'prove' their antecedents, as well as the latest law passed by Uttar Pradesh banning interfaith marriages based on so-called love jihad are all part of the grim reality that is the new India.

However, while the short-sighted and intellectually dubious ideologues of the Sangh may paint the Muslim as the eternal outsider, Islam and Muslims are very much part of the fabric of India. Any attempt to erase their contribution and physical presence can only be attributed to fascistic tendencies. Is the international community — which has sworn to never forget the fascist purges of

20th-century Europe — willing to apply the same moral standards and censure to India for persecuting its Muslims?

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The Future Of Saudi-US Relations In Biden Era – OpEd By Dr. Mohammed Al-Sulami*

Saudi Arabia and the US have shared a long strategic alliance, ever since President Franklin D. Roosevelt met with the founder of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz, in 1945. Saudi-US relations have continued to evolve in a way that serves the interests of both countries.

Although ties have sometimes cooled and experienced tensions, as is always the case with political relations between countries, the relationship between the two has not fundamentally changed. It has pivoted on strong strategic cooperation in the region and the world.

Some analysts, however, are expecting a potentially significant shift in Saudi-US relations during the term of President-elect Joe Biden. According to their viewpoint, relations between Washington and Riyadh will deteriorate, perhaps surpassing the decline in relations witnessed during the term of former President Barack Obama. This is because Biden worked in the Obama administration and contributed to its foreign policy positions at the time. This is in addition to his close relationship with Obama, who played a big role in urging US voters to vote for Biden, and the president-elect's decision to appoint a handful of prominent Obama-era officials to his administration.

While this viewpoint has gained traction in media circles, one can boldly and definitively say that Saudi-US relations will not, during the Biden administration, achieve the same highs as witnessed during Donald Trump's term. This is for several reasons. Saudi Arabia was President Trump's first foreign destination after taking office and, on his watch, Saudi-US relations witnessed great harmony in terms of several economic, security, political and geopolitical issues.

This level of harmony may be described as exceptional, even in the framework of the strong relations that exist between the two countries. Nevertheless, if we take a wider and more comprehensive view of the history of relations and common interests between Riyadh and Washington, over more than seven decades, we will find that the Biden administration is unlikely to be an exceptional case.

This is because Saudi Arabia is neither a banana republic nor a marginal state. Rather, it has great global economic and political weight. It is also the most prominent exporter of energy and the holder of the largest oil reserves in the world, while the spiritual status of the Kingdom, with it embracing the Two Holy Mosques, gives it a hefty and unique position. In addition, Riyadh is a distinguished international partner in combating terrorism, countering it intellectually and stifling it financially, and is the largest contributor to the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Furthermore, Washington recognizes the influence of Saudi Arabia on global energy prices. A recent and good example in relation to this is the letter written by US shale oil companies to Trump asking him to discuss with Saudi officials the possibility of raising energy prices to a level that serves the interests of both countries. The fact that the cost of extracting shale oil is double that of conventional oil illustrates the importance of Saudi Arabia to the US domestic economy.

Besides, Middle Eastern experts who witnessed the significant developments in the region that took place during the Obama administration — including the so-called Arab Spring protests, the support provided to political Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and the developments in Arab-Israeli relations — know that it will be almost impossible to turn back the clock. In fact, many controversial issues and topics from that period have become much clearer to the Arab public, particularly Saudi society.

At the Saudi domestic level, Riyadh has introduced significant reforms at all levels over the past five years and many of the allegations that the Democrats hurled at Riyadh are now redundant. Historically, the US Democrats and the left have focused on specific issues like human rights.

They have also pushed for regional negotiations and political settlements without offering firm solutions to regional problems. Rather, they have primarily wanted to leave a legacy. This is a mistake that the Obama administration made and hopefully the next US administration will learn from in order to refrain from pushing the region into further conflict.

In brief, Riyadh has sufficient capacity to defend its national interests and build good relations with the incoming US administration, as has always been the case with previous US administrations, while enjoying privileged relations with other international actors, such as China, Russia and the EU. Biden's four-year term will not lead to a big shift in the long-standing Saudi-US relations. Rather, the Biden administration is expected to be busy with domestic issues, the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, and rebuilding Washington's strained relations with Europe.

In relation to Iran, the Biden administration might seek a new nuclear agreement. However, this agreement will be preceded by consultations with Washington's Gulf allies, particularly Saudi Arabia, as Biden's position on Iran's hostile behavior and missile program is in line with Saudi Arabia's.

In addition, Biden is expected to be tougher on Turkey in relation to Recep Tayyip Erdogan's projects on both the European and Libyan fronts. This is also in line with Saudi Arabia's position. Contrary to reports in the media, I do not rule out positive developments in Saudi-US relations and the signing of major deals between the two allies.

Lastly, we must keep in mind that the statements made during election campaigns should not be taken too seriously, as they are primarily projected to persuade voters. The comparison of Trump's statements against Saudi Arabia during his election campaign with his positions after his arrival in the White House provides a telling example. In fact, this sort of rhetoric is a regular feature of every election campaign. Perhaps former Saudi Ambassador to the US Prince Bandar bin Sultan's description of the election campaign period as "silly season" is apt in this regard.

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Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/08122020-the-future-of-saudi-us-relations-in-biden-era-oped/>

A Look Back at US Presidents By Raheem Khan

As Joe Biden will take the oath as the 46th President of the United States on January 20, 2021 let's take a look back at the history of US presidents. As US Presidents came in all shapes and sizes, it is important to know which of these contributed the most for the country, and which Joe Biden can treat as his role model for this job.

The very first oath as US president was sworn on April 30, 1789 by George Washington, a military general, statesman and the founding father of the nation. He is known for his heroic leadership in the continental army during the American Revolution (1775-1783) in securing American independence from British colonialism. As he served as President for two terms from 1789 to 1797, he presided over the convention that drafted the constitution as he believed that the US constitution must promote liberty and democracy.

In the 1800 US presidential elections between Vice President Thomas Jefferson and President John Adam, Jefferson defeated Adam making him the third US president. Thomas Jefferson was another founding father who served as the very first US Secretary of State from 1790 to 1793 and Vice-President from 1797 to 1801, mainly remembered for writing the Declaration of Independence which was ratified on 4th July 1776. As president from 1801 to 1809, he helped increase the country's power and protect trade by purchasing Louisiana from France.

In 1861, Abraham Lincoln also known as "Honest Abe" was sworn in as the 16th President of the United States. Abraham Lincoln was a poor self-taught lawyer who fought for the Republican Party and supported the abolition of slavery. As president from 1861 until his assassination in 1865, he strengthened the country's finances, and led the nation through the Civil War (1861-1865) between the Union States (who opposed slavery) and the Confederate States (who supported slavery) which resulted in victory for the Union and President Lincoln. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 which resulted in more than three million African Americans from the Confederate States to obtain freedom from getting enslaved.

As the US went through the Great Depression due to the Wall Street Crash of 1929, a new President from the Democratic Party was sworn in 1933. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, also known as FDR, issued his campaign slogan which was to fix the crisis and served as president from 1933 until his death in 1945. In 1933, FDR issued the New Deal which was a series of programmes that provided support for the poor; it also reduced prices of goods to strengthen the economy and provided safety to the banking industry. It resulted in a huge success as the US recovered from the Great Depression resulting in strong economic growth.

In 1953, Dwight D Eisenhower was sworn in as the 34th President of the United States. Also known as "Ike", he was a five-star general and served as the supreme commander of the Allied expeditionary force during World War 2. As President, he made a truce on the Korean War (1950-1953) and signed the Federal Highway Act of 1956 for the Construction of the Interstate Highway System.

As this job can be seen as challenging, it is important to make wise and correct decisions and learn from the greats of the past. There is a lot at stake for Joe Biden; he inherits the world superpower when it is in the middle of a deadly pandemic and a country which is perhaps more divided than ever. He also has to resolve the longest-running conflict of the US abroad. Thus, it can be useful to look back at these greats, those who passed stimulus packages, who fought against tyranny, who helped resolve conflicts, so he can inculcate those lessons in his time as President as well.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/08-Dec-2020/a-look-back-at-us-presidents>

Biden Won't Reset US Foreign Policy On His Own – OpEd By John Feffer*

Joe Biden is a cautious man of the center. He has anchored the moderate camp of the Democratic Party for several decades. For many, he is a welcome antidote to the last four years of fire and fury, like a bite of white bread to alleviate the pain of a mouthful of habanero pepper.

The reassurance Biden provides is that of the status quo ante. Donald Trump promised a return to an illusory golden age. Joe Biden offers a reset to the Obama years — a bronze age at best, but one that at least existed.

As he assembles his foreign policy team, Biden is predictably drawing from past Obama administration figures. By embracing these middle-of-the-road figures, the new president is mindful perhaps of confirmation battles to come in a Senate that is either in Republican hands or so precariously in Democratic control that a single defection could prove ruinous.

Progressives are understandably upset at Biden's reliance on establishment types among his first picks. And it's true that the team so far has not been a transformative bunch.

But progressives should not pay too much attention to personalities. Three other factors are more important: the overall policies of the administration, the shifting geopolitical context, and the popular pressure that progressives can bring to bear on Biden's emerging priorities.

Barack Obama was notoriously frustrated with the foreign policy elite in Washington that resisted some of his more ambitious initiatives, particularly around reducing the U.S. military footprint in the Middle East.

Obama encountered perhaps even stronger pushback from hawks in both parties who distrusted his nuclear deal with Iran, détente with Cuba, and efforts to reduce the nuclear arsenal. Even though he wasn't able to shift the focus of U.S. foreign policy away from the Middle East, Obama did manage to win enough support from the foreign policy elite on Iran, Cuba, and climate change.

Biden so far is relying on that same foreign policy elite. His choice for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, has long been in Biden's foreign policy orbit, first in the Senate and then as the vice president's national security advisor. With his knowledge of European affairs and his fluent French, he'll quickly repair relations across the Atlantic. He's a firm believer in international partnerships, but he also has more interventionist leanings than Biden, having supported the military action in Libya and a more aggressive position on Syria.

Biden's other picks have been likewise familiar. Jake Sullivan, his choice for national security advisor, was an Obama administration mainstay, as was CIA pick Avril Haines, who'd been a deputy CIA director. John Kerry, the climate czar, was Obama's secretary of state. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the nominee for the UN representative, was in charge of the Bureau of African Affairs under Obama. The proposed head of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, was the deputy secretary of DHS during the Obama years.

When it comes to foreign policy, there aren't many leading candidates outside the establishment consensus who cast a critical eye on the Obama administration's foreign policy.

Appointees of a more realist persuasion — Harvard professor Stephen Walt, for instance, or former CIA analyst Paul Pillar — might have nudged Biden to shrink the U.S. military footprint overseas. But that presupposes an institutional commitment to reexamining American exceptionalism. Such realism is occasionally found among academics or former government officials, but seldom among those who still aspire to top positions in the foreign policy elite.

Much has been made of the links many of these nominees have to the consulting firm WestExec that Blinken created with Michelle Flournoy, who's in the running for Pentagon chief. Avril Haines is also a WestExecutive.

The name itself tells you all you need to know about the connections of the principals: West Executive Avenue links the West Wing of the White House and the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Technically not a lobbying firm, WestExec doesn't have to disclose its client list, which only adds to its mystique.

Let's face it: this is the swamp.

It's not Trump's version of an old boy's network, which featured outright corruption, cronyism, and nepotism. Rather, Biden is bringing back the more familiar inside game of influence-peddling, which is technically legal but morally suspect. WestExec is firmly part of that world. But then, what did you expect, that Biden would nominate people who'd spent the last four years volunteering for Habitat for Humanity rather than profiting from their elite connections? That's not how Washington works.

Biden is surrounding himself with people like himself: consummate insiders. They know how to interact with their foreign counterparts and will hit the ground running on day one of the administration. They will be competent, which generally is a good thing, except if they're prosecuting a bad policy. Trump's people could have done a great deal more damage if they'd actually been good at their jobs.

Focus on the Policies

Even skeptics of the Great Man approach to history — that those in power determine the course of events — often put inordinate emphasis on individuals in contemporary politics like presidents, cabinet officials, and congressional leaders. Of course these people have power and influence. But they all must operate within institutional constraints, in larger geopolitical contexts, and according to the vagaries of popular pressure.

Consider the examples of China and climate change.

On relations with Beijing, I'd love to see a secretary of state who favors the kind of engagement necessary to avoid military conflict and wrecking the global economy. But the foreign policy consensus on China has shifted in the last five years — an evolution I describe here — so there's no real engagement camp from which to recruit a secretary of state.

Biden himself has leaned toward a more cooperative relationship. But during the presidential campaign, *The Economist* reports, "Biden had to be reprogrammed on China, says an adviser. It seems to have worked. Mr. Biden has since called Xi a thug."

Even if a China expert like Lyle Goldstein were to be appointed to a top administration position, he would be a lone voice. The best to hope for in this situation is Blinken's preferred mix of containment, and engagement. "China poses a growing challenge, arguably the biggest challenge, we face from another nation state: economically, technologically, militarily, even diplomatically," he told CBS. "And, you know, the relationship has adversarial aspects, competitive aspects, but also cooperative ones." At least the secretary of state is open to win-win scenarios. A change of personnel absent a change in consensus will not go very far.

On climate change, meanwhile, the policy consensus has shifted the right way within the Democratic Party toward greater recognition of the urgency of the crisis. Although Biden hasn't adopted the language of the Green New Deal, his "clean energy revolution" comes pretty close. Appointing John Kerry to the new position of special presidential envoy for climate is a strong indication of Biden's seriousness. Bringing Kerry into the Cabinet and giving him a seat on the National Security Council are even stronger signs.

This policy shift is far more important than the person who occupies the position. It's of course extremely useful that Kerry has the international contacts as well as the specific experience of helping to negotiate the Paris accords. But he will have to answer not only to Biden but to an energized environmental movement that has young activists at the forefront.

He'll also be operating in a different international context than the one in which he participated in the Paris negotiations. Although some countries continue to drag their feet on limiting carbon emissions — Brazil, Russia — the rest of the world is beginning to realize the enormity of the challenge. The Paris accords set an informal goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. A number of countries have made legally binding pledges to achieve that goal: the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Hungary, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea.

Sweden was the first country, in 2017, to set a legally binding goal ahead of 2050. It has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2045. Austria and Iceland have more informally set 2040 as their goal, Finland is looking at 2035, and both Norway and Uruguay expect to achieve the mark by 2030. Bhutan and Suriname are the only two countries that currently absorb more greenhouse gasses than they emit.

Biden has pledged to make the United States carbon neutral by 2050. The domestic pressure will be on the administration to carry through on this pledge even as Kerry will face pressure on the international stage for the United States to do even better.

Shifting Geopolitical Context

As long as the Biden administration doesn't need to push a treaty through the Senate, it will have a relatively free hand on foreign policy. It can rejoin the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accord. It can lift restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba. It can negotiate its way back into the Iran nuclear deal. It can extend the New START treaty with Russia. Republicans can squawk all they want. It will be their turn once again to feel helpless in the face of executive power.

But the world has moved on from 2016. The Trump team has left messes pretty much everywhere it camped around the world. A two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian stand-off has become ever more remote. The Iranians are understandably wary of U.S. promises of reengagement, and the reformists might only be in power for another half year in any case, pending an early summer election. Europeans are increasingly skeptical of relying on the United States for anything. China is hedging its bets after several years of more hostile U.S. policy.

Biden's foreign policy team will have to navigate this new world. Their intentions — good, bad, indifferent — may end up mattering very little as they come up against the new geopolitical realities.

Moreover, other countries are making a whole new set of calculations based on the domestic discord that Trump sharpened over the course of four years. Dmitry Suslov is a professor of international relations at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow. He recently gave this prognosis of U.S.-Russian relations in the Biden era:

Moscow expects Biden to spend the better part of the next four years mired in all-consuming domestic political battles, making any significant breakthroughs in the U.S.-Russian relationship impossible.

Under these circumstances, Russia will try to avoid a new arms race or direct military confrontation with the U.S., but will hope for little else... Instead, it will prioritize strengthening ties with China and other rising powers like India.

One can easily imagine other countries — China, North Korea, Iran — making a similar calculation. Even putative allies like Japan or Australia are likely to loosen their grip on the American bandwagon over the longer term.

From the naïve perspective of many Americans, the right Cabinet nominees will push the Biden administration to do the right thing on a number of foreign policy issues. In reality, the world will often go about its business with scant regard to what anyone in the Biden administration says or does. Thanks in no small part to Donald Trump, the United States just doesn't matter as much anymore.

Progressive Pressure

The Obama administration was pragmatic to a fault. When Obama endorsed nuclear disarmament, he was careful to say that neither his children nor perhaps even his grandchildren would see that goal realized. And when it came to passing the New START deal with Russia, Obama committed to a massive modernization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal in order to secure Republican support for the treaty. If there had been a powerful, influential peace movement in the United States, Obama wouldn't have had to curry favor with Republican hawks.

The Biden administration will have only so much bandwidth for foreign policy. The Democrats want to win a clear congressional majority in 2022 as well as a second presidential term in 2024. They have to deliver, first and foremost, on the economy. If progressives want to score wins on foreign policy, we need to frame key items on our wish list in domestic economic terms and turn up the popular pressure accordingly.

Our efforts to reduce carbon emissions have to be framed as a massive jobs bill connected to the creation of clean energy infrastructure.

Our desire to avoid a Cold War with China begins with the removal of tariffs that ultimately hurt U.S. farmers and manufacturers and continues with cooperation in clean energy that grows that sector in both countries.

A détente with Cuba and a nuclear deal with Iran both give U.S. businesses a leg up in both countries and thus also can have job-creation potential domestically. Yes, of course there are quite a few items on the progressive wish list that are not so easily connected to the U.S. economy. Free global access to a COVID-19 vaccine doesn't translate into more American jobs. But the Biden administration has to prove that it's working on behalf of struggling Americans, even with its foreign policy.

If it can't make that case, the Biden administration won't have a chance to undo all the damage of the last four years much less push the United States in a more progressive direction, regardless of how progressive members of the foreign-policy team happen to be.

*John Feffer is the director of Foreign Policy In Focus and the author of the just-released book, *The Pandemic Pivot*.

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/06122020-biden-wont-reset-us-foreign-policy-on-his-own-oped/>

Characteristics and Limitations of Foreign Policy Determinants By Iftikhar Ahmed

Henry Kissinger once observed that U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century was characterized by “disastrous oscillations between over-commitment and isolation”. The oscillation was especially pronounced for republicans in the first half of the century from president Theodore Roosevelt’s great white fleet of 1907-9 to secretary of state Charles Evans Hughes Washington naval treaty in 1922 and from senator Robert Taft’s isolationism before world war II to senator Arthur Vandenberg’s 1945 conversion to internationalism- although the internal difference became much less pronounced in the second half. Now that the pendulum appears to be swinging again republicans have an interest in seeing that it doesn’t do so wildly.

How to do that? Every type of persuasion moral, political, policy, carries with it the temptation of extremes. Contrary to the stereotype, big-military conservatives (along with neoconservatives) do not want to bomb every troublesome country into submission, or rebuild the U.S. armed forces to their 1960s proportions, or resume the cold war with Russia. Nor is the problem that big-military conservatives some appreciate the limits-but they also understand the United States is nowhere near

reaching them. Even at the height of the Iraq war. U.S. military spending consorted a smaller percentage of GDP 5.1 per cent in 2008 than it did during the final full year of the Carter administration (six percent in 1980). The real limits of American power haven’t been seriously tested since World War II.

They fancy that a retreat from the United States global commitments could save lives without storing trouble. The record of the twentieth century tells different story

Instead, the problem with big military conservatives is that they fail to appreciate the limits of American will of Washington capacity to generate broad political support for military endeavours that since 9/11 have proved not only bloody and costly but also exceedingly lengthy. Taking a heroic view America purpose, these conservatives are tempted by a heroic view of the American public, emphasizing its willingness to pay any price and bear any burden. Yet there is a wide gap

between what the United States can achieve abroad, given unlimited political support, and what Americans want to achieve, as determined by theebb and flow of the political tides in a democracy innately reluctant to wage wars.

Small government conservatives have their own temptation when it comes to foreign policy. At the far extreme, there is the insipid libertarianism of Rou Paul, the former Texas representative, who has claimed that Marine detachments guarding U.S. embassies count as examples of military overstretch. Paul showed remarkable strength in the last GOP presidential primary and has, in his son Rand Paul, the junior senator from Kentucky, a politically potent heir.

Most small government conservatives aren't about to jump off the libertarian cliff: they may want to reduce the United States footprint in the world, at least for the time being, but they don't want to erase it completely. Yet the purism that tends to drive the small government view of the world also has a way of absorbing its vision, "If we don't take defence spending seriously, it undermines our credibility on other spending issues," Mick Mulvaney, the conservative south Carolina congressman, told politico in December.

The heart of the United States spending issue, however, has increasingly little to do with the defense budget (which constituted 19 percent of overall federal outlays in 2012, down from 49 percent in 2012, increasingly more to do with entitlement programs (62 percent in 2012, up from 31 percent half a century ago). Just as the Obama administration cannot hope to erase the federal deficit by raising taxes on the rich but wants to do so anyway out of a notion of social justice, small government conservatives cannot hope to runaway spending through large cuts to the defense budget. But ideological blinders get in the way.

More broadly, small government conservatives are too often tempted to treat small government as an end in itself, not as a means to achieve greater opportunity and freedom. They make a fetish of thrift at the expense of prosperity. They fancy that a retreat from the United States global commitments could save lives without storing trouble. The record of the twentieth century tells different story. Republicans should not wish to again become the party of such isolationists as Taft and Charles Lindbergh.

Fortunately, there is a happy medium. It's not what goes today under the name "realism" – a term of considerable self-flattery and negligible popular appeal.

Republicans, in particular, will never stand for any kind of foreign policy that lacks a clear moral anchor. As it is, the GOP does not need a total makeover: what it needs is a refurbished modus vivendi between small government and big military conservatives, two sides that need not become antagonists and have valuable things to teach each other.

Small government conservatives, for their part, can teach their big military friends that the pentagon doesn't need more money, what it needs desperately is a functional procurement system. The costs of U.S. jet fighters, for example, have skyrocketed: the F-4 Phantom, introduced in 1960, cost \$16 million (in inflation-adjusted 2010 dollars) per plane, excluding research and development, whereas the equivalent figure for the F-35 Lightning II, in development now, is \$120 million. The result is an underequipped air force that invests billions of dollars for the research and development costs of planes, such as the B-2 Bomber and the F-22 fighter that it can afford to procure only in inadequate number. The result is not just the ordinary waste, fraud, and abuse of any bureaucracy but also deep and lasting damage to the country's ability to project power and wage war.

Finally, those in the government camp understand that unlike authoritarian states, democratic ones will not indefinitely sustain large militaries in the face of prolonged economic stagnation or contraction. Except in moments of supreme emergency, when it comes to choice, butter always beats guns. Big-military conservatives, therefore, cannot stay indifferent to issues of long term economic competitiveness and the things that sustain it, not least of which is a government that facilitates wealth creation at home, promotes free trade globally, is fundamentally friendly to immigrants, and seeks to live within its means.

Then there are the things big military conservatives can teach their small government friends. First, they should make clear that a robust military is a net economic asset to the United States. A peaceful, trading, and increasingly free and prosperous world has been sustained for over six decades thanks in large part to a U.S. military with the power to make good on U.S. guarantees and deter (or would be) aggressors. And although the small government purist might dismiss as corporate welfare the job, skills, and technology base that the so

called military industrial complex support supports, there are some industries that on great power can allow to wither or move offshore.

In retooling foreign policy, the experts should heed lessons from both types of conservatives. What does this mean in practice? Consider China, where an atavistic nationalism, emboldened by an increasingly modern military, threatens to overtake the rational economic decision making that largely characterized the tenures of deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. U.S. policymakers need to restrain the former and encourage the latter.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/699259/characteristics-and-limitations-of-foreign-policy-determinants/>

How the U.S. Should Leave Afghanistan By

Monica Toft

While on a recent foreign trip, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with the Taliban negotiating team in Doha, discussing a potential ceasefire and political settlement between the militants and the U.S.-backed government in Kabul. The efforts at intra-Afghan peace talks have, generously speaking, sputtered. But no matter how these talks do or don't progress, it is long past time for the United States to leave Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, each time an administration gets close to leaving, influential voices give reasons given for why it can't leave. The first and most difficult is that the United States can't trust the Taliban to abide by any agreement it signs: if the Taliban have a choice between answering to God or answering to the international community, they'll choose God. All other reasons given fall away from there; but the critical issue is that once the Taliban back away from whatever they agree to in the short term, Afghanistan will return to the status quo antebellum.

That means four things: first, an unencumbered trade in opium; second, expanded space for domestic and foreign jihadists to train to kill 'crusaders;' third, the painstaking reconstitution of Afghan women's rights (human rights in general, actually) achieved over the past twenty years will collapse; and finally, Afghans who have profited from the U.S. intervention (and many others) will flee with their families, adding to the toll of refugee reactions shifting politics to the political right in host countries.

All four are certainties, which means that in the final accounting the United States and its allies will have suffered fantastic costs in blood and treasure for little achieved. The Vietnam end game is worth recalling in this particular respect: by 1968 the United States understood there was no way to win, but no U.S. president wanted to helm an administration that "lost" Vietnam.

But now, after nearly twenty years in Afghanistan, the United States and its long-suffering allies need to admit defeat and leave: we lost.

In order to get that done it is worth admitting that the underlying argument for staying after the destruction of the Taliban in 2002 was just plain wrong. The Bush administration erred when it shifted the traditional U.S. intervention algorithm from a Swiss Army knife approach (multiple tools working in tandem) to a disproportionately offensive military response (a big sword against shadowy warriors who hide amongst civilians), attacking 'over there' rather than defending here. That shift was understandable as an emotional overreaction to attacks of 9/11, and in Bush's defense, that reaction was widely popular at the start. This is no longer the case: upwards of 7 in 10 veterans and their families support a full withdrawal of U.S. forces.

But today we need to reach for some version of peace with honor. This is doable, even with the Taliban, and shift to homeland defense in collaboration with our allies. The Taliban of today may reach an agreement that protects Afghan women, works to reduce the scourge of opium-to-heroin production and addiction, and refuses to accept the presence of foreign jihadis on Afghan territory. As in the Vietnam and Soviet peace deals, this would enable the United States to say it departed with honor, and that its intervention had not been in vain. Then, about two years later, when the new Taliban reneges on the agreement, and Afghanistan returns to the status quo, we can say that wasn't our fault. Once again, the Russian Federation will have to shoulder the burden of defending against the scourge of a Taliban-governed Afghanistan. However, withdrawal does equate to complacency. We do have tools other than military might in our arsenal to deal with a Taliban-led Afghan government that will want recognition, including continued diplomatic efforts and sanctions.

As to homeland defense, that's do-able too. Recall that in 2015, as the United States and its allies tightened the noose around ISIL, Europe suffered a devastating series of ISIL terror attacks resulting from serious intelligence and intelligence sharing failures. But since then, the United States and its European allies have made great strides in the use of new methods and technologies to dramatically reduce the risks of the kinds of terror attacks that might arise from the return of Afghan territory to terrorist training habitat. We cannot defend against everything, but the costs of attempting to fight terrorism abroad have already been shown to be prohibitively counterproductive and unpopular.

Leaving is going to hurt, no question. But the hurt we may suffer from leaving is far less than the hurt we and the Afghan people are certain to sustain if we refuse

to face reality and continue to preside over a broken military intervention. There are alternatives to military force, let's use them.

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Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/skeptics/how-us-should-leave-afghanistan-173901>

World Outlook in 2021 By Muhammad Omar Iftikhar

The year 2020 was marked with unprecedented chaos, unthinkable confusion, and unparalleled commotion. The pandemic that spread across the world compelled entire continents to experience a lockdown—a sight we never thought to witness. From Europe to Asia; from North America to Australia; the world was shell shocked when people began falling ill because of the virus and losing the battle of life. Strict SOPs including social distancing measures, using hand sanitisers and wearing masks became a part of our lifestyle. This lifestyle, however, was without the freedom of enjoying get togethers at restaurants or family events and socialising with peers and colleagues at the office. The new normal, as the world calls it, soon enveloped us. The concept of work-from-home became the modus operandi as online video calls replaced board room meetings and the same happened to how faculty members interacted with their students; from the comfort of their home as physical classes were suspended.

Now as we are in the last month of 2020—a year that we wished never arrived—we need to look to the future. It is hard to predict what will happen in 2021, but some analysis can be shared. The new normal will continue to be our motto and routine as we enter 2021. Meetings, interviews, discussions, and debates will be held through online video calling applications. Webinars, seminars, workshops, and conferences will be held digitally. While this has limited our interaction with colleagues, it has reduced organisational costs as well. Moreover, such online events can be witnessed by a global audience and do receive traction on digital and social media. Such virtual events will continue to be held as the second wave of COVID-19 is gaining strength across the world.

While talking about the new normal, we must keep an eye on the ‘Great Reset’. It is a proposal to restructure the world economy presented by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Interestingly, it was presented in May 2020, almost two to three months after the countries began going into a lockdown. It was proposed by Prince Charles and Klaus Schwab, Director of WEF.

According to the Great Reset, such policies will be implemented that will enhance capitalism through investments targeted towards environmental projects. The proposal gained a backlash as nearly 80,000 people in less than 72 hours signed a petition against implementing such a policy.

Where the Great Reset will take the world in terms of socio-economic, environmental, and political progress is yet to be seen. What matters is that the powers that be do not use the pandemic to their unfair advantage.

At the political and diplomatic forefront, the year 2021 may witness the forging of new relations and mending of old ties. China and South Korea signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) recently that may bolster their ties. However, this equation may change if US President-elect Joe Biden's policies bring South Korea closer to Washington and take it farther away from China. Where China and the US had a turbulent relationship under Donald Trump's era, they will certainly try to create new grounds to co-exist in a changing world. Two countries that did not have a diplomatic relationship until now were Bhutan and Germany. The two countries, having a distinct socio-political structure, aim to strengthen their newly developed ties when Ambassador of Bhutan Maj. Gen. Vestop Namgyel and Ambassador of Germany Walter Lindner, met at the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in New Delhi recently. Time will tell what exchange of resources and ideas these countries will experience. Similarly, Saudi Arabia formally established relations with Zimbabwe intending to expand the mutual corporation. One must wonder what interest will Germany and Saudi Arabia have in Bhutan and Zimbabwe respectively. Either it will be to tap into natural resources or to use them as a shield against their regional adversaries. The year 2021, therefore, will be a year when people, societies, communities, and nations will try to adjust to the new normal and in circumstances never experienced before. From the change in the US Administration to the rolling out of the COVID-19 vaccine, the social, economic, and political changes will continue to happen in 2021.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/12-Dec-2020/world-outlook-in-2021>

The China Challenge After 2020 – Analysis

By Marvin C. Ott

(FPRI) — The most urgent and immediate issues facing President-elect Joseph Biden will be domestic ones. Still, foreign policy will inevitably and necessarily become a major focus of the new administration.

President-elect Biden prides himself on his international expertise, but he will quickly discover that the world has changed profoundly in the four years since he was vice president. At the core of this transformation lies China—a rising economic and military superpower with huge ambitions and a global presence that is shaping not just Asia, but also Africa, Latin America, and Europe. At the same time, international relations and national power are increasingly defined in terms of science and technology. If you ask the Pentagon what will determine whether U.S. power will remain preeminent, the answer is that it all depends on whether America can retain its technological edge.

In the Obama years, Europe saw China as primarily an Asian concern. But today, China is a major and growing presence in Europe. Chinese officials, with money to spend, are all over Europe looking for large infrastructure investments as part of the Belt and Road Initiative designed to link Europe to China. Already, China has effectively taken ownership of the Greek port of Piraeus with the stated intent of making it Europe's biggest and most important maritime hub. Much of China's push has been IT—with a particular focus on tech giant Huawei as a provider of low-cost telecommunications equipment intended to monopolize Europe's conversion to 5G networks.

The Chinese government had similar ambitions for Huawei in the United States. However, citing Huawei's close ties to Chinese intelligence agencies, American security experts under both Obama and, particularly Trump, raised the alarm. As a result, Huawei is being forced to leave the U.S. market. American concerns regarding Huawei and other Chinese IT platforms have been urgently communicated to European officials—and, beginning with Britain, European governments have begun to follow the U.S. lead.

Huawei can be seen as a leading indicator in a broader policy shift in Europe that promises to change the global strategic landscape in important ways. European officials are calling for a new partnership with America—and with Asia—designed to counter China. Europeans see a reimagined NATO as the institutional core of what would become an interlocking set of coalitions involving current NATO members, plus Japan, South Korea, Australia, and probably India and several Southeast Asian countries. The common denominator would be twofold: a shared concern regarding China's hegemonic ambitions and a shared commitment to democracy. The latter has gained urgency with Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong's democratic institutions.

World War II and the Cold War were contests between Western democracy and totalitarianism, so a new coalition of democracies against a totalitarian China and an autocratic Russia (that poses its own threat to the West) seems to fit a familiar pattern. But this time, the democracy coalition is much broader and more diverse—extending from Washington to Paris, from Tokyo to Canberra, and beyond.

This would be a much more complex strategic undertaking than the Cold War. It would involve multiple coalitions comprising different members. For example, an alignment aimed at defending the sea lanes through the South China Sea would include the United States, Australia, Japan, perhaps Singapore, plus Britain, France, and even Germany. A coalition focused on cybersecurity in Europe would have a different composition. In all likelihood, the United States and Japan might be the only countries present in every variant. All this is a bit speculative and visionary, but planning has already begun—much of it centered on NATO. A NATO Reflection Group has produced a conceptual framework, and the process of updating NATO's Strategic Guidance document is underway. There are proposals on the table to establish one or more NATO liaison offices in Asia while extending NATO's existing Partnership for Peace outreach beyond Europe to Asia. Concerns regarding IT networks and security have been the subject of a recurring Prague Security Conference.

There is no shortage of test cases calling for a shared U.S.-Europe-Asia approach. Australia is currently under massive Chinese economic pressure/coercion because Canberra has resisted Beijing's attempts to influence Australia's domestic politics. Australia needs broad international support. India is considering a ban on Huawei in favor of European-built IT networks. But

Huawei's 5G equipment is much less expensive. New Delhi needs European governments to help European suppliers become cost-competitive.

The global geopolitical landscape is poised on a new configuration. For the Biden administration, it will be a huge challenge—and opportunity.

The views expressed in this article are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a non-partisan organization that seeks to publish well-argued, policy-oriented articles on American foreign policy and national security priorities.

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Fragile Middle East | Editorial

It's not just the Israel-Palestine conflict that makes the Middle East (ME) volatile. Many other countries in the region are involved in proxy fights against each other. The latest attack on a Singapore-flagged tanker by an explosive-laden boat off Saudi Arabia's port of Jeddah resulted in an explosion and subsequent fire. Thankfully, the crew, with assistance from the shore fire brigade, succeeded in averting a possible catastrophe should the fire get out of control.

Unsurprisingly, after Saudi Arabia chose to lead the fight in Yemen against Houthi rebels, Riyadh and oil tankers near the Saudi shore come under constant attacks. The first suspicions in the present case would fall on the Houthi rebels, as the incident happened weeks after what Riyadh previously alleged attacks by the Houthi movement. But jumping to a conclusion without concrete evidence is not a prudent option either.

Last October, an attack on an Iranian oil tanker days ahead of Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan's visit to Iran suggested that the inimical forces wanted to keep ME a region where any incident could cause an all-out fight between countries. Perhaps, the way forward before the opposing sides is to sit together and find out the culprits who wish to see an unstable ME.

Similarly, the international community also needs to keep a close eye on affairs in the ME, lest the violence reach unprecedented levels. The ground situation in Yemen because of the ongoing conflict has caused the worst humanitarian crisis post the Second World War. The global powers must play their role in ensuring that the opposing parties do not choose the usual divisive narrative. We are already seeing the reverberation of the Yemen conflict in the ME. Such encounters come with spillover effects, especially when non-state actors are involved. It is about time that the parties to the conflict give a chance to mediation.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/16-Dec-2020/fragile-middle-east>

Sleepwalking Toward the Nuclear Precipice

By Ernest J. Moniz and Sam Nunn

One of the best accounts of the lead-up to World War I, by the historian Christopher Clark, details how a group of European leaders led their nations into a conflict that none of them wanted. Gripped by nationalism and ensnared by competing interests, mutual mistrust, and unwieldy alliances, “the Sleepwalkers,” as Clark dubs them, made a series of tragic miscalculations that resulted in 40 million casualties.

Around the world today, leaders face similar risks of miscalculation—except heightened by the presence of nuclear weapons. The United States and Russia together possess more than 90 percent of the world’s atomic arsenal, but they share the stage with seven other nuclear powers, several of which are engaged in volatile rivalries. Whereas a century ago millions died over four years of trench warfare, now the same number could be killed in a matter of minutes.

President-elect Joseph Biden, Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris, and their incoming national security team must confront the sobering fact that the potential for nuclear weapons use shadows more of the world’s conflicts than ever before. A single accident or blunder could lead to Armageddon. As a result, Biden will need to chart a new path on nuclear policy and arms control—one that creates new safeguards against accidental or ill-considered use of nuclear weapons and shores up international mechanisms that have long helped to keep the peace.

UNTHINKABLE, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE

The warning bells have been ringing for years. We wrote in *Foreign Affairs* more than a year ago (“The Return of Doomsday,” September/October 2019) about the elements that have destabilized the previous equilibrium and increased nuclear risks: where national interests clash, countries are making less use of dialogue and diplomacy than they once did; and as arms control structures have eroded, advanced missile systems, new technologies, and cyberweapons have appeared on the scene. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of the international mechanisms for managing transnational risks and underscored the need for new cooperative approaches to anticipate and deal with threats. One

lesson of COVID-19 is that the unthinkable does happen. And with nuclear weapons, the consequences would be even more devastating.

To reduce the risk of nuclear accident or war, the Biden administration must reestablish nuclear dialogue with key nuclear states and other important powers. To be successful, however, it will have to build a working relationship with Congress, including with its Republican members, on issues that should be not just bipartisan but nonpartisan—such as arms control, nuclear policy, and diplomacy with other nuclear powers.

One lesson of COVID-19 is that the unthinkable does happen.

U.S.-Russian relations are in a dismal state, but Washington and Moscow must once again acknowledge that they share an existential interest in preventing the use of nuclear weapons. The Biden administration and congressional leaders must also acknowledge that fact and work together to reverse the erosion of arms control dialogue and structures that have for many decades made the world a safer place. Dealing with adversaries in the nuclear arena calls for diplomacy, not posturing. Both the Biden administration and Congress must create the political space for the United States and Russia to renew military-to-military, diplomat-to-diplomat, and scientist-to-scientist engagement.

Biden has spent decades fostering cooperation within Congress and between Congress and the executive branch. As soon as possible, he should work with Democratic and Republican leaders to create a new bipartisan liaison group—comprising House and Senate leaders and committee chairs—focused on Russia policy, nuclear dangers, and NATO. Such a group would strengthen the president's negotiating hand with Russia by demonstrating bipartisan support for a new direction in U.S. nuclear policy and arms control—one that advances both U.S. and global security.

NUCLEAR RESTART

There is much Biden can do to signal an immediate shift in U.S. policy. He can begin to rebuild alliances and regional security structures that have atrophied under his predecessor. He can set out a national security strategy that reduces the role of nuclear weapons. And he can articulate these changes in a comprehensive speech on nuclear policy, which would send a powerful signal to allies and adversaries that the Biden administration is committed to restoring U.S. leadership on nuclear policy and arms control.

Equally important will be a series of executive actions that the new president can take in his earliest days in office. Chief among them will be to make good on his promise to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia before it expires on February 5. This treaty is crucial to sustaining verification of and limits on strategic nuclear forces. Biden should extend it for five years—the maximum time period permitted. Doing so would engender broad support at home and among European and Pacific allies.

With this crucial building block in place, Biden should announce a reduction in deployed strategic nuclear weapons—from the 1,550 permitted under the treaty to, say, 1,400 by the end of 2021—and urge Russia to make a reciprocal commitment. Deeper reductions could be achieved but may require mutual understandings or agreements with Russia and possibly with other nuclear weapons states. Such negotiations should encompass new weapons delivery systems and potentially new domains—cyber, for instance—but they should not be so expansive in scope that they foreclose a path to a new agreement within the term of the New START extension.

Biden could direct a review of the U.S. nuclear command, control, and warning system.

Biden could also direct a review of the U.S. nuclear command, control, and warning system, including “fail-safe” steps to safeguard against cyberthreats and the unauthorized, inadvertent, or accidental use of a nuclear weapon. Such a review should consider options to increase warning and decision time for U.S. officials and, if possible, lay the groundwork for reciprocal changes in Russia. Both the U.S. and Russian presidents should welcome the possibility of longer decision times, given the extraordinary responsibility on their shoulders to avoid a nuclear blunder. The United States could also encourage other nuclear states to conduct their own internal fail-safe reviews as well. These could serve as a foundation for broader risk reduction measures that nuclear powers could adopt, whether bilaterally or at the regional level: for example, establishing cyber “rules of the road” that preclude cyberattacks on nuclear facilities, nuclear command-and-control structures, and early-warning systems.

Perhaps the most consequential change Biden could make would be to place guardrails around the president’s sole authority over the use of nuclear weapons.

Since the end of the Cold War, military capabilities have evolved in ways that compound the already immense pressure a president would be under to decide, perhaps within minutes, whether to use nuclear weapons. To help ensure that any future decisions of this magnitude would be deliberative, based on appropriate consultations, and undertaken in a manner consistent with the Constitution and with U.S. and international law, Biden should sign a directive creating a new process for the use of nuclear weapons. The directive should stipulate that any decision to use nuclear force—either first use or self-defense when the decision-making timetable allows—should involve consultations with specified senior executive branch policy and legal officials as well as with the leaders of both parties in Congress. These new procedures could be reinforced through legislation. While drafting such a law, Congress could conduct a careful review of the severe erosion of its constitutional responsibility to declare war—and investigate how the War Powers Act has practically ceased to function and might be remedied.

A WAR THAT MUST NEVER BE FOUGHT

In the long term, the Biden administration will need to make a sustained diplomatic effort to revive the many processes, mechanisms, and agreements that allow nations to manage their relations in peacetime and thus to avoid nuclear conflict. That stabilizing architecture is impossible to maintain without dialogue. The United States will specifically need to restart talks about crisis management with Russia and between NATO and Russia. It will also need to restart separate talks with China. In the absence of that dialogue—intended to avoid or resolve incidents that could escalate into conflict—Washington will find it much harder to reach a mutual understanding with Moscow and Beijing on nuclear risk reduction.

More broadly, the United States and Russia should revive the admonition, articulated by both President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Working with China, France, and the United Kingdom to make the same declaration would send a powerful signal that despite tensions in other policy areas, leaders recognize their responsibility to work together to prevent nuclear catastrophe. It would also help build momentum for additional nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament steps—which in turn would strengthen the commitment of countries without nuclear weapons to forgo developing them.

A common declaration of this sort could serve as a foundation for subsequent cooperation between nuclear powers. This could include securing nuclear materials, establishing a moratorium on Russian and U.S. intermediate-range land-based missiles west of the Urals, reducing U.S. and Russian forward-based nonstrategic weapons, and easing the escalating competition between offensive nuclear forces and missile defenses in Europe and Asia.

The lesson of World War I is that mutual misunderstandings can lead even reluctant leaders into conflict. World leaders are once again sleepwalking toward the precipice—this time of a nuclear catastrophe. They must wake up before it is too late.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-12-15/sleepwalking-toward-nuclear-precipice>

Talking Peace While Making War By Malik

M Ashraf

THE hopes kindled by the US-Taliban Agreement in February 2020 and subsequent commencement of intra-Afghan dialogue on 12 September to end the two decade old conflict in Afghanistan, still remain unfulfilled. The Taliban and the Afghan Government have not yet been able to discuss the substantive issues concerning future political structure in Afghanistan and restoring peace except agreeing on the modalities to continue the dialogue. No doubt the continuation of the dialogue in itself is a positive development but the progress is dismally slow. While two sides are engaged in a dialogue at Doha, violence in Afghanistan continues unabated. It is a situation of talking peace while making war which is hardly conducive to any positive outcome of peace talks.

I think for the peace talks to move forward it is imperative to agree on a ceasefire because if the fighting continues it could lead to derailment of the dialogue and adding complexity to the already volatile situation. It is pertinent to point out that in the US-Taliban agreement the two sides agreed on a temporary reduction in violence and reiterated that a lasting cease-fire among US, Taliban and Afghan forces will be part of intra-Afghan negotiations. History testifies to the fact that all conflicts and wars ended through dialogue between the warring parties or through multilateral efforts preceded by cessation of hostilities. The situation in Afghanistan is very complex and there is also no dearth of elements which are out to sabotage this peace process. It is therefore incumbent upon the Taliban and the Afghan Government to not only guard against such attempts but also exhibit real leadership in ending the crisis and giving peace to the Afghan people. It is a historic opportunity for them to end the plight of the Afghan people. History will not forgive them if they fritter away this chance. It is now or never situation. They need to act sensibly and with utmost sincerity of purpose.

Peace in Afghanistan is linked to regional peace and shared economic prosperity. All the regional stakeholders including Pakistan have been contributing towards peace efforts between the Taliban and US as well as encouraging intra-Afghan dialogue to find an Afghan owned and Afghan-led solution to the conflict. Pakistan has played a leading role in this regard and it continues to strive for the success of the intra-Afghan dialogue with utmost

sincerity and unfaltering commitment. This point was reiterated by Prime Minister Imran Khan while talking to the delegation representing Doha-based Political Commission of Taliban led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, by saying that Pakistan wished success of the dialogue and would continue to support it. He also reiterated the desirability and need for peace in Afghanistan saying that there was no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. One can hardly take exception to what he said. It is pertinent to point out that Pakistan has not only played a role in bringing Taliban and US to the negotiating table and facilitating intra-Afghan dialogue but it has also made strenuous and sincere efforts to erase the ambience of mistrust between it and the Afghan Government which unfortunately always looked askance at efforts made by Pakistan in this regard. Now that those efforts have succeeded in setting the ball rolling, Pakistan would very much like to see a positive outcome in the shape of reconciliation in Afghanistan. The visit of the Taliban delegation at this moment is of great significance. It is hoped that as a result of the discussions that took place between them and the Pakistani leadership things will start falling in place and give further impetus to the dialogue process. Apart from the regional countries US is also striving for implementation of the peace deal with Taliban and the success of intra-Afghan dialogue which would facilitate US exit from Afghanistan as planned. The elections in US have ended the Trump era and it is not sure whether the Biden Administration would stick to the deal with the Taliban or change plans about pulling out the US and NATO troops completely. The policy by the new administration if different from the Trump Administration could also affect the progress in the intra-Afghan dialogue. Therefore it would be in the interest of Afghanistan and the internal stakeholders to conclude their dialogue before the new President takes oath.

The Taliban must agree to a ceasefire to facilitate the success of the dialogue. They must realize that it were mostly the Afghan people who have been and continue to bear the brunt of the conflict in Afghanistan. More than 157,000 people have died in the war since 2001, according to researchers for the Costs of War Project at Brown University. More than 43,000 civilians have died, and by 2018 there were almost 2.5 million Afghan refugees worldwide, according to the UN refugee agency. Analysts estimate that about 45,000 Afghan troops and police officers have been killed in the past five years. Tens of thousands of Taliban fighters are also believed to have been killed since 2001. Therefore the Taliban and the Afghan Government owe it to their people to let them live in peace. There is no doubt that discussing and reaching an agreement on sharing

power, disarming and reintegration of Taliban into society, determining the future of the country's democratic institutions and constitution and overcoming the ethnic, sectarian and tribal differences form a challenging undertaking for the negotiating parties but given the will and determination to restore peace in Afghanistan, nothing is impossible.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/talking-peace-while-making-war/>

Why America Needs a Foreign Policy Reset

By Dimitri K. Simes

THE UNITED States today faces real geopolitical peril, and neither the Biden team nor the broader U.S. foreign policy establishment acknowledges the gravity of the situation. President-elect Joe Biden and his advisers like to speak not only of renewed American leadership, but also of a restoration of the liberal international order and the American ability to simultaneously act as a revolutionary power and be at peace. In fact, the danger of a nuclear confrontation is growing. This uncomfortable truth is rarely acknowledged, but not for a lack of warning. Rather, a new normal has emerged in American foreign policy debates where the dangerous implications of U.S. policies are downplayed so that the pursuit of American hegemony can continue unquestioned, without any meaningful congressional scrutiny or the kind of genuine political debate that existed during the Cold War. But in world politics, benign intentions do not assure impunity.

At the same time, the United States is confronted by emboldened and embittered adversaries such as China and Russia and handicapped by confused and uncertain alliances—starting with NATO—which seem to exist not so much as tools of U.S. foreign policy but as sacrosanct symbols of Western virtue. Beyond these unnecessary adversaries and uncertain alliances, there is also a growing fragmentation of world politics unparalleled since World War I. That fragmentation renders otiose the popular term “international community.” The United Nations acts far too often as a forum for international debates rather than as an effective regulating mechanism.

This crisis of the international community is paralleled by a crisis of the American expert community, which—in the context of growing political polarization and the decline of the national interest as a guiding principle—has markedly surrendered its former moral and intellectual authority. President John F. Kennedy once famously called upon Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Rather than answer this appeal, experts today frequently act as just another self-interested group, rarely prepared to talk truth to power if it comes at any real cost. In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger describes a 1955 meeting between then-President Dwight Eisenhower’s Special Assistant for

Foreign Affairs Nelson Rockefeller and a group of academics. Eager to offer their advice on the domestic political benefits of various foreign policy approaches, the scholars were taken aback when Rockefeller rebuked them. “I did not bring you gentlemen down here to tell me how to maneuver in Washington—that is my job,” Rockefeller said. “Your job is to tell me what is right.”

Seeing what passes for expert foreign policy analysis today, I often feel like I’ve been whisked back to Leonid Brezhnev’s Soviet Union, where one had to use obligatory terms and demonstrate devotion to political orthodoxy in order to be taken seriously. Terms like “democracy,” “liberal international order,” “alliances,” “aggression,” and “disinformation” are routinely deployed not as analytical tools that help interpret the world but rather as buzzwords intended to show that whoever is using them is prepared to play by the rules.

This lack of analytical rigor is nowhere more evident than in dialogue on NATO. NATO is routinely depicted as an unassailable cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. Ironically, the necessity of these foreign alliances was not self-evident to the first U.S. president, George Washington, who in his farewell address warned about the danger of permanent entanglements, particularly in Europe. Alliances, he warned, “facilitat[e] the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists.” Closer to our own time, George F. Kennan presciently warned against NATO expansion, predicting that it would poison U.S.-Russia relations and inevitably place the two countries on a collision course. “Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia,” Kennan told *The New York Times* in 1998. “[The NATO expanders] will say that ‘we always told you that is how the Russians are’—but this is just wrong.” The fact remains that Russia made a key contribution to the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union and acted carefully in the 1990s—before NATO expansion reached across the former borders of the USSR—not to put itself onto a collision course with the United States. In fact, no Russian military intervention against a neighboring country occurred until the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict when, in a tit-for-tat process, Georgian forces attacked Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia.

Proponents of NATO expansion rarely bother to look at the history of Eastern Europe before making snap judgments about the strategic and moral imperative for U.S. involvement in the region, virtually always on the side of Russian neighbors in dispute with Moscow. Consider the Baltic states. They had no history of statehood until sponsored by German-occupying forces in 1917–18.

They maintained their independence until 1940, when they were again annexed into the Soviet Union as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Mikhail Gorbachev abjured using force when the Baltic states began to demand independence as the Soviet Union disintegrated in the late 1980s. Boris Yeltsin rejected military operations even more than Gorbachev. The new Russia quickly recognized the Baltic states as independent nations, without any demand for territorial concessions. No evidence exists, therefore, of any Russian aggression against the Baltic states that would justify their later entry into NATO—an expansion that virtually brought the alliance into the suburbs of Saint Petersburg. To make NATO expansion possible, moreover, Latvia and Estonia disenfranchised their own citizens of Russian origin. How these two states were able to meet NATO's democratic requirements has never been adequately explained, nor seriously discussed. The introduction of a new military infrastructure in the Baltic states has only triggered an increase in Russian military activity, and it has become increasingly difficult to figure out who provoked whom first. Nobody wants a nuclear war, but if the Baltic states view NATO's Article 5 as providing them impunity against Russian retaliation for their efforts to turn NATO and the EU against Russia, they may be playing with fire. That potentially nuclear fire can easily spread to Europe, and even to the United States.

On top of the illusory security provided by alliances, there is also a widespread misconception about the challenges that come from supposed U.S. adversaries, especially China and Russia. Both countries are, at this juncture, clearly adversaries—if for no other reason because the United States has determined that they are hostile powers and must be treated as such. Neither Beijing nor Moscow are in a mood to surrender, and each in its own way has taken actions that adversely affect American security. Whether this state of relations is inevitable (and in the American interest) is another matter entirely.

China has indeed presented an unparalleled challenge to American global hegemony, having already surpassed the United States in terms of purchasing power, raising its military expenditure much faster than the United States, mastering new sophisticated technologies, and establishing political and economic relations across the globe. But these developments raise two crucial questions. First: to what extent is an unquestionable global hegemony—which the United States has enjoyed since its victory in the Cold War—feasible in this new era and essential for U.S. security? And second: what is the exact nature of

Chinese ambitions, and do these ambitions require China to strive to replace America as a world leader?

Bumper sticker clichés such as the “Chinese Communist Party,” the “genocide” against the Uighurs in Xinjiang, and the blame for the “Chinese virus” all carry some element of truth, but they are also misleading. The CCP has indeed turned China into an authoritarian state, but China also has a market economy that allows considerable intellectual and personal freedoms. More importantly, China is not an ideologically militant state that seeks to impose its doctrines abroad. The recent protests in Hong Kong, to cite one example, reflect not only Chinese authoritarian control, but also Hong Kong’s complex history with Beijing, to whom the United Kingdom provided the authority to run Hong Kong under certain limits. This combination of special circumstances makes the Chinese treatment of Hong Kong certainly regrettable, but more damaging to Hong Kong’s financial markets than to U.S. national interests. As far as Chinese military activities in the South China Sea are concerned, the United States is right to oppose them, but it must also be realistic. America did not ratify the Law of the Sea Convention—which provides the legal basis for challenging China’s conduct in that area—and most of the affected neighboring states, moreover, have already eased their tensions with China.

The Chinese challenge is momentous, but it is also complex and must be understood with analytical seriousness and without dangerous oversimplification. It certainly requires maintaining and enhancing U.S. military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region and protecting American manufacturing and know-how. But lurching into a new cold, or even hot, war with Beijing is inimical to American national interests.

The Russia challenge is in a different category. As far as its economy is concerned, Russia is not in the same league as America. Vladimir Putin is reluctant, however, to surrender to the notion that the United States, together with its allies, is entitled to more or less govern the world, including the Russian periphery. He is particularly hesitant to create the impression that he will bend to American pressure. But Moscow is not looking for a permanent confrontation with the United States and NATO either. On the contrary, it has made clear that even if it is subjected to periodic sanctions and condemnation, it remains open to cooperation in many areas, ranging from arms control and climate change to conflict resolution. In the absence of Russian military aggression against NATO

or meaningful Russian interference in the U.S. political process, the appointment of Russia as the main enemy could do unjustified harm to American interests. Such exaggerated depictions not only prevent the United States from focusing on other priorities—foremost, China—but also tend needlessly toward nuclear brinkmanship with an economically weak but militarily powerful nation.

There are three main dangers associated with the current American—and more broadly, Western—policy toward Russia. First: there is the real and dangerous possibility of escalation in areas where U.S. and Russian forces stand eyeball-to-eyeball, as in Syria, or on the high seas. The growing number of incidents involving the two militaries makes increasingly apparent that Russian forces have been instructed to act more assertively, and it would take only the slightest miscalculation for one of these incidents to spin out of control. Second: there is mounting evidence of irritation with Putin’s approach of “strategic patience” among the Russian elite, as well as a growing insistence that the only way to change the negative dynamic with the West is through escalation and reliance on military force, which would leave no doubt that Russia is willing and able to play hardball. Last, but not least: there is a realistic possibility of a Chinese-Russian tactical alliance. China and Russia would clearly prefer to have normal relations with the United States rather than build an alliance against it. Yet history is filled with instances of strange bedfellows that had momentous foreign policy consequences—the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 being the foremost example. As Chinese and Russian elites grow increasingly frustrated with America, the temptation to cut the United States down to size through a joint Chinese-Russian effort only intensifies. Even in the absence of such an alliance, giving Beijing the sense that it can reliably count on Moscow’s support cannot be in the American interest.

Understanding the complexity of Chinese and Russian actions does not amount to any expectation that Beijing and Moscow could become American friends. Nor does recognizing the danger in NATO’s reckless misuse imply that we need to abandon NATO altogether and reject the demonstrable benefits of a global network of alliances. Instead, we must recognize that world affairs are rarely black and white, that alliances should serve as instruments of U.S. policy rather than as ends in themselves, and that—like it or not—history as we always knew it has returned. Those who resist accepting this essential fact risk finding themselves on the wrong side of history.

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Russia is Back — But in a Different Way By **Shahid Javed Burki**

Russia is back on the front pages of Western newspapers but not in the way it was expected to appear on the global scene 30 years ago. Then, in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Eastern Europe and Central Asia moved away from communism, there was an expectation that it would quickly join the West. That was the hope that led the group of the world's seven richest countries — the G7 — to invite Russia to join them. The G7 became G8. That association did not last for long since Vladimir Putin's Russia refused to play by the rules expected of developed Western states. Moscow defied those by invading Georgia and breaking up Ukraine by annexing the Crimean Peninsula. To respect internationally accepted borders was a rule all countries were expected to follow. Moscow's defiance resulted in the expulsion of Russia from G8.

In a book published in 1993, sociologist Francis Fukuyama predicted that after years of ideological conflict that had resulted in two World Wars, the end of European Communism meant the end of history. In the work that carried that title, the author predicted that Western-style representative democracy would prevail over other systems. Initial steps taken by Moscow in the pre-Putin era suggested that Moscow may be moving in that direction. But that did not happen. Putin initially followed the Constitution and stepped down from the presidency after serving the stipulated terms in office. He came back and changed the governing document that would keep him in power for as long as there was no serious opposition to his rule. That's one reason he has been totally intolerant of people and movements that threaten his rule.

Any analysis of Putin's priorities should begin with his geopolitical interests. The Middle East is an area of high priority for him. The principal drivers of the Russian President's policies in the region are geopolitical. At the top of his list is the need for containing and diminishing Islamist extremism and radicalism that might expand into Russia and its immediate neighbourhood. Present-day Russian Federation includes several predominantly Muslim republics, from Chechnya and Dagestan in the North Caucasus to Tartarstan and Bashkortostan in the Volga River basin. Muslims now account for 12% of the country's total population. With higher rates of fertility compared to the country's average, the

Muslim share is increasing. Immigrants from the Muslim majority countries that were once part of the USSR have arrived in large numbers, many illegally. According to a review of the Russian situation by Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, several immigrant groups had “pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State. Radical ideology is spreading across Russia; and since the 1990s, terrorism is a constant threat all over the country, particularly in the major cities”. Trenin traces Russian interest in the Middle East to its policies that go back some centuries. “Russian foreign policy was focused on displacing the Ottoman Empire from the Black Sea and the Balkans. Persia was de facto divided between Russia and Britain into their respective zones of influence. St Peterburg’s designs on Constantinople and the Turkish Straits were the main reasons for Russia joining World War I.”

There were other Russian interests in the Middle East. Some were related to military considerations and some reflected Moscow’s economic considerations. Putin was nervous about his country’s dependence on oil and gas. He was interested in developing other exports and including military hardware and nuclear power stations. He incurred Washington’s displeasure by agreeing to sell to Turkey an advanced radar system to Turkey the Russian S-400 surface to air missile system. Despite pressure to cancel the deal on the part of the Trump administration, the scheduled delivery of the system was brought forward from the first quarter of 2020 to July 2019.

Under its long-serving President, Russia is not even pretending to create a Western-style system of governance. The latest example of Putin’s approach towards the opposition is the attempt to assassinate Alexei A Navalny, a long-time rival. The details of the incident became public when Navalny was able to dupe an official of Russia’s domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Security Service, FSB. According to one account, “the FSB, a successor agency to KGB that Mr Putin ran before becoming president, has become a dominant behind-the-scenes force in Russian politics and business. The call Mr Navalny released on December 14 added to the trove of evidence suggesting that the agency had organized — and botched — an assassination attempt against the country’s most prominent politician.” The call was made from Germany where Navalny remained for medical care but has vowed to return to Russia once recovered.

The other front-page news concerned the widespread hacking of the United States government agencies by what were identified as Russian agents. It was

not clear what type of information they were interested in collecting by penetrating computer systems in the US. True to form, President Trump who, in the last days of his tenure as president, refused to comment on the revelation. But President-elect Joe Biden in a news conference excoriated the Trump administration for its failure to prioritise cyber-security over the past four years. The Russian “assault happened on Donald Trump’s watch when he wasn’t watching”, said Biden and blamed the departing President for what he called “irrational downplaying of the seriousness of this attack”. Why was Russia carrying out this campaign?

There are two features of the Russian approach — high numbers of channels and messages and a shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions. The Russians were spreading falsehoods to the American people in order to reduce their trust in their own government. According to David E Sanger of The New York Times, “this hacking was the most sophisticated known theft of the American government data by Moscow since a two-year spree in 2014 and 2015 in which Russian intelligence agencies gained access to the unclassified email systems at the White House, the State Department, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It took years to undo the damage.” It was not clear why Trump was prepared to go along with Putin and his government. He had passed over without comment or action a number of Russian actions including the findings by American military intelligence that they had offered the Taliban in Afghanistan to pay them for killing US servicemen.

The point of this analysis is to suggest that Russia’s return to global prominence is not as a contributor to global peace and development but as a major disrupter. While not physically close to Pakistan, Moscow’s approach in international affairs can and probably will affect Pakistan’s neighbourhood. It has, for instance, re-appeared in Afghanistan in ways that are disturbing that long-troubled country’s attempt to make political progress. It is negatively influencing the Afghan attempt to fashion a society out of diversity. Russia has close relations with some of Afghanistan’s northern neighbours that were once part of the USSR. Tajiks and Uzbeks are not fully reconciled to creating a political system in which the central government operating out of Kabul has the final word in governance. They are being encouraged by Moscow.

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Endings For Beginnings: Reaching A Brexit Deal – OpEd By Binoy Kampmark

It was a hurried dash and came just before the end of the transition period. The UK and the European Union have reached an agreement on the tortuously long road of Brexit. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson can take the deal back to his constituents and Parliament, claiming he achieved something less horrendous than a no-deal Brexit. EU diplomats can claim to have also chalked up some vital concessions.

Johnson's lectern mood was stubbornly confident. On December 24, he reiterated the reclaiming of British sovereignty, making the dubious assertion that "we left on Jan 31 with that oven-ready deal." (The ingredients for the meal still had yet to be gathered.) Now, he could boast that, "we have completed the biggest trade deal yet, worth £660 billion," likening it to a "Canada style free trade deal between the UK and the EU" that would preserve jobs in the country.

UK goods and components could continue being sold without tariffs and quotas within the EU market. There would "be no palisade of tariffs on Jan 1. And there will be no non-tariff barriers to trade." But even better, praised Johnson, the deal "should allow our companies and our exporters to do even more business with our European friends." Keeping in mind his Brexit audience, he insisted that Britain had "taken back control of laws" and "of every jot and tittle of our regulation." British laws would not be subjected to EU scrutiny; the European Court of Justice would no longer be an irritating final arbiter of UK cases. British standards – from the biosciences to financial services – would be British and British alone.

From the start, the negotiating strategy of the Johnson team was askew. Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya underlined the point in an interview with Politico earlier this month. At its heart, Brexit had revealed "the illusion of independence and the need to manage interdependence". Trade agreements, to that end, were designed to shore up the latter, not assert the former.

The concept of interdependence, that great evil of the harder Brexiter line, survives. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasised the

point in her remarks on the deal. While the debate had “always been about sovereignty,” the substantive question to ask was what sovereignty meant in the twenty-first century. Little Englander types would have found her thoughts on this disconcerting, even menacing. “For me, [sovereignty] is about being able to seamlessly do work, travel, study and do business in 27 countries.” It entailed a collective voice and “pulling each other up – instead of trying to get back to your feet alone.” The deal had not altered that reality. “We are one of the giants.”

When it comes to the level playing field argument, the European Commission could also claim that fair competition would endure, and that “effective tools” were on hand to deal with market distortions. Cooperation with the UK would continue “in the fields of climate change, energy, security and transport.” But the equivalence arrangement will be problematic for that most vital of UK exports, the financial services industry. Matters of data protection and other financial standards will have to fall into line with the EU. On such matters, the UK can hardly claim to have embraced total, unadulterated freedom.

The same goes for the European Court of Justice, which will continue to retain a small foothold in the UK. The ECJ will be the highest tribunal of appeal for Northern Ireland, which has been given special status in the agreement. That trouble plagued province will also continue to be subject to EU single market and customs union rules.

In cases where the EU and the UK have disagreements – for instance, on the issue of harmful divergence from common standards as they stand on December 31, 2020 – a dispute resolution mechanism will be triggered. A binding arbitration system will come into play. This dampens the sovereign mad enthusiasts in Britain. Yes, the agreement speaks against tariffs, but they can still be used and will link the EU and Britain for years to come.

On the nagging point of fishing rights, UK negotiators had to relent. The value of fish caught by EU vessels in UK waters will be reduced by a more modest 25%. Von der Leyen expressed satisfaction, as well she might: “We have secured a five and a half years of full predictability for our fishing communities and strong tools to incentivise it to remain so.” Johnson could only call the period “a reasonable transition period,” and assure “great fish fanatics in this country that we will as a result of this deal be able to catch and eat quite prodigious quantities of extra fish.”

In reality, this means that the spirited message of taking back control of the seas has failed, at least for the period when adjustments will have to be made. This caused considerable displeasure to Nigel Farage, leader of the Brexit Party, who accused British diplomats of dropping “the ball before the line” in a “fisheries sell-out”.

While the deal is unlikely to be sabotaged when Parliament is reconvened, members will only have the shortest of time to consider a bulky document. As one MP told Fraser Nelson of *The Spectator*, the UK’s chief negotiator David Frost “might have missed something. He’s a good negotiator but he’s not Einstein.” The EU also had the better legal eagles; those from the UK had never wanted Britain to leave the EU in the first place.

Staunch remainers such as Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon see little to merit the arrangements, positioning her nation for the spring. “Before the spin starts, it’s worth remembering that Brexit is happening against Scotland’s will.” No deal would be able to “ever make up for what Brexit takes away from us. It’s time to chart our own future as an independent, European nation.”

In concluding her statement, von der Leyen drew upon T.S. Eliot: “What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning.” Johnson preferred a rather less profound formulation. “That’s the good news from Brussels, now for the sprouts.”

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/27122020-endings-for-beginnings-reaching-a-brexit-deal-oped/>