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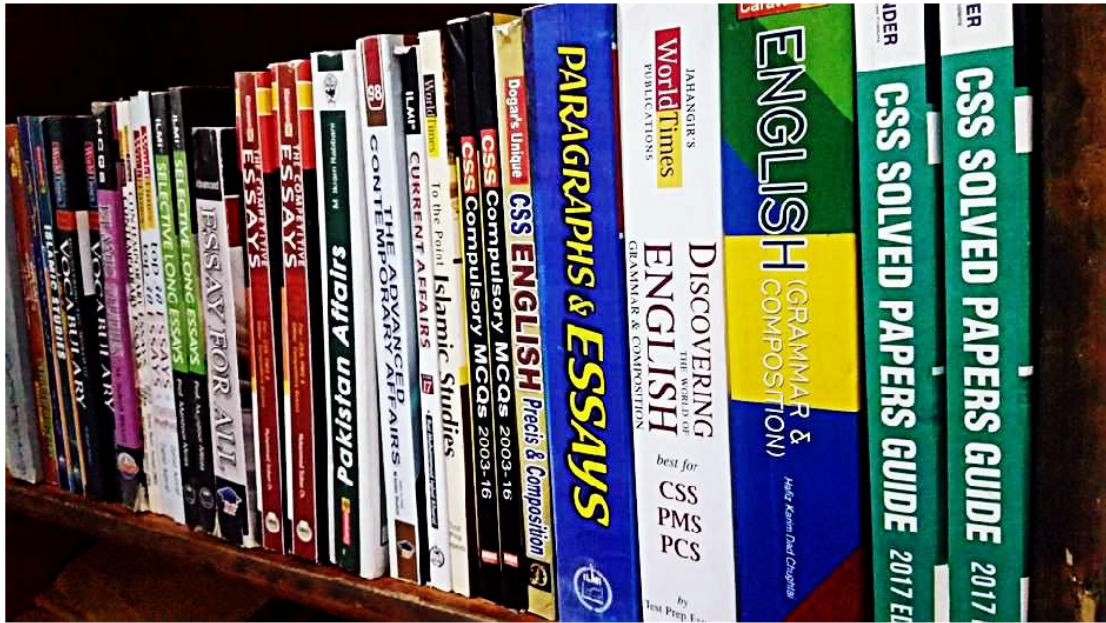
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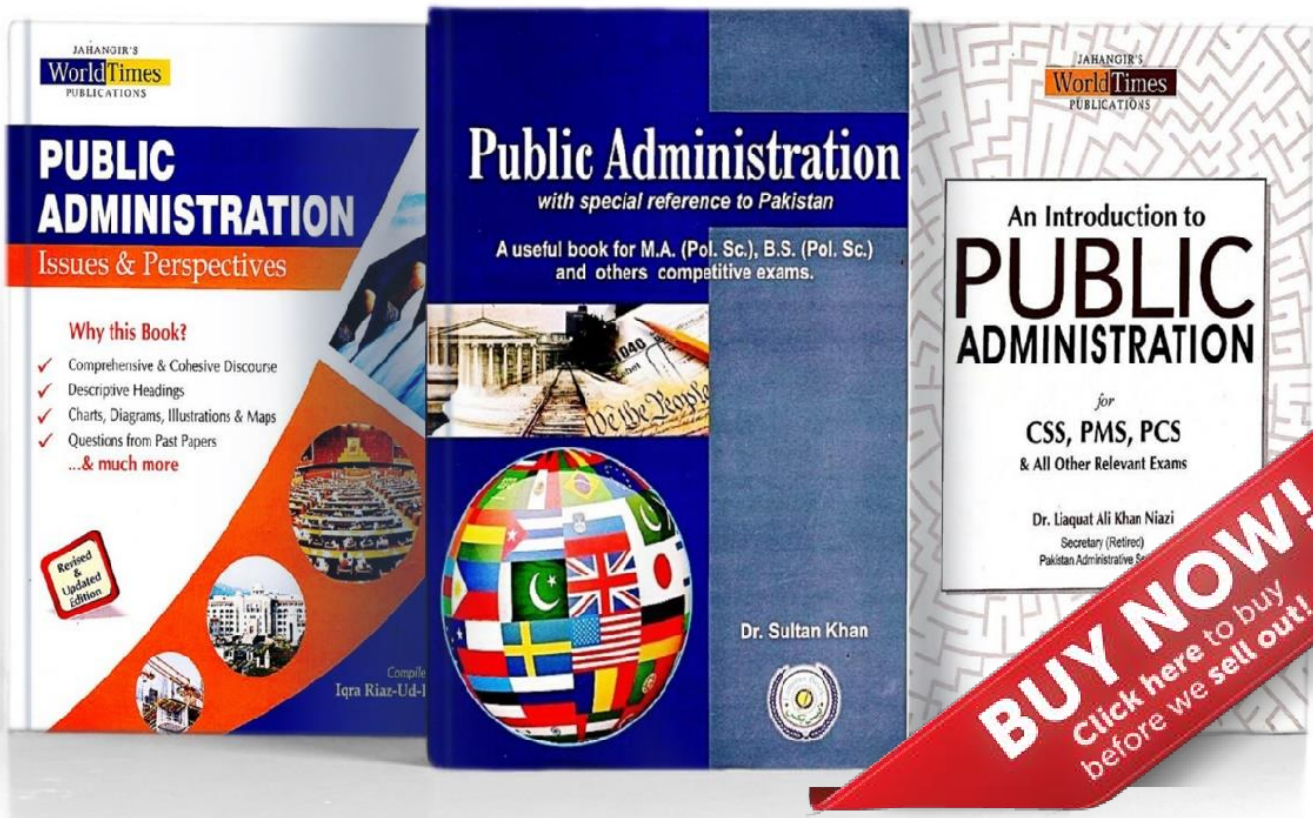
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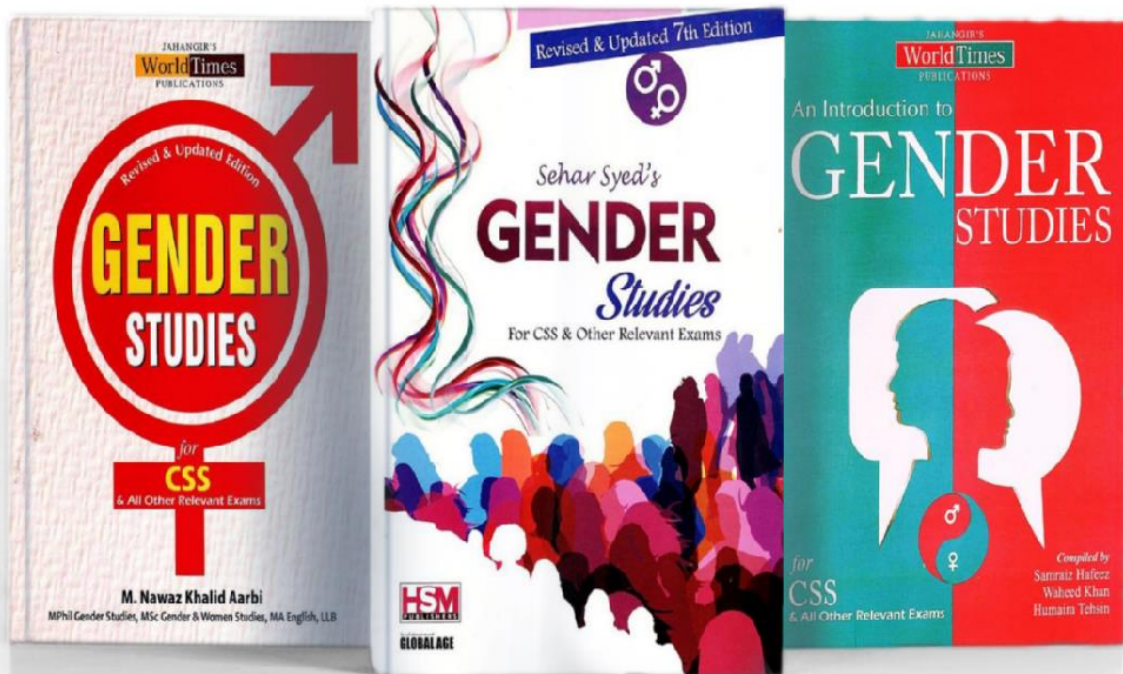
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Pak-China-Russia Trilateral Strategic Gamut **By Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi**

THE strong relationship between China and Pakistan, as illustrated most recently by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, has long played a key role in Asia's geopolitics thereby paving the way towards trilateral strategic bonds between China-Pakistan and Russia.

However, broader regional developments over the last few months also mark the possibility of a new coalition involving Pakistan, China, and Russia.

This article focuses on the evolving relationship between the three countries; considers how real and potentially effective this trilateral partnership-perhaps fuelling the US policymakers to weave a strategy, thereby counterbalancing the US interests in the region and beyond.

This piece also endeavours to analyze the factors propelling such development and seek to discern the possible implications it may have on global geopolitics.

Needless to say, Russia's robust engagement with China coupled with the recalibration of its ties with Pakistan, coming at the backdrop of Russia's increasing estrangement with the West, Pakistan's dissatisfaction with the USA over the suspension of security assistance, and India's closeness toward the latter are leading scholars and political analysts to remark that Russia, China and Pakistan are gradually inching toward the formalization of an 'axis' or a strategic 'counter alliance' against the US-India ,and the US-NATO-Quad trajectory.

And yet, there are emerging signs that this trilateral symmetry is going to be a reality without any iota of doubt.

The undeniable significance is the emergence of converging interests among these three states that is gradually leading to deeper engagements among them.

The ongoing trilateral partnership between the three states is certainly dominated by the energy cooperation accompanied by opening new corridors of economic cooperation among them.

This development is a logical corollary to China's expanding economic footprint and influence in South and Central Asia, Pakistan and Russia will likely desire to lessen their economic dependency on China.

Certainly, it is in their best interests to revitalise bilateral economic cooperation. Russia, with its abundance of natural and human resources, possesses huge potential to grow economically.

Arguably, beyond South and Central Asia, Moscow has taken its eastward pivot actively by pursuing FTAs with Southeast Asia such as Vietnam (2016) and Singapore (2019).

As Moscow's economic footprint in Asia is still relatively low, Islamabad can dynamically capitalise on this opportunity to expand cooperation and attract Russian investment.

And most importantly, entailed by the strategic expediencies or concerns regarding China's growing economic prowess and the deepening of United States (US)-India relations, Russia has developed a new interest in engaging with Pakistan.

Following the conclusion of the Russia-Pakistan Technical Committee meeting in 2020, both countries revived discussions on the North-South Gas Pipeline Project.

The project was initially inked in 2015, but it was put on hold due to Western sanctions imposed on Rostec, a Russian state-controlled company that was a stakeholder.

The PSGP is one of the largest Russian investments in Pakistan since the (former) Soviet Union assisted in developing the Oil and Gas Development Company and Pakistan Steel Mills in the 1960s and 1970s.

Russia is eager to welcome Pakistan as a new energy client as it plans to triple its LNG production capacity and increase LNG exports by 2035. Besides the PSGP, Russian companies have filed proposals to supply more LNG to Pakistan.

Lavrov, the Russian FM highlighted in his visit to Islamabad in April 2021 that Rosatom and the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission are exploring cooperation in using nuclear energy for medicine and industry purpose.

The Pak-Russian officials meeting in the last week of November In Moscow is evidence to this development.

Moscow is likewise concerned with Beijing's increasing assertiveness in foreign policy and improved economic and military capabilities.

In 2017, Russia initiated the expansion of the SCO membership to India to dilute the Chinese dominance in the organisation; China responded that this would be possible on the condition that Pakistan too joined as a member.

Recently, Pakistan and Russia signed the "Security Training Agreement" to train Pakistani military officers in Russian military institutions for the first time.

While Pakistan and Russia are not publicizing the nature of their cooperation as openly as Islamabad would do in Pakistan's agreements with China, the trajectory is quite clear.

Pakistan is keeping its options with Moscow and Beijing open after the Trump Administration stopped military support and training for Pakistan military.

For the NSG bid, Pakistan logically expects from both China and Russia to support Pakistan to qualify for the eligibility criteria.

Pakistan envisages NSG membership to be a crucial element of Pakistan becoming part of the mainstream in the nuclear world order, which it believes would confer some sort of legitimacy to its nuclear weapons program, as has been the case with India.

Afghanistan is another core area where Islamabad, Beijing, and Moscow share their joint interests.

The increasingly close bilateral relationship between China and Russia is one of the most interesting, consequential, and surprising geopolitical developments since the end of the Cold War.

Beijing and Moscow, once bitter adversaries, now cooperate on military issues, cyber security, high technology and in outer space, among other areas. While it falls short of an alliance, the deepening Sino-Russian partnership confounds the US policymakers in Washington.

Some have proposed driving a wedge between the two countries, but this stratagem seems unlikely for the foreseeable future.

In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover, China and Russia seemed to have pursued shared interests and avoided undercutting each other.

The two countries have engaged in some parallel actions of late by holding military exercises with Central Asian partners — both bilaterally and within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Russia has been expanding its economic cooperation and diplomatic outreach with Pakistan, while China perseveres in developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a key artery of the Belt and Road Initiative.

It appears that Washington is also developing its geostrategic clout in global affairs, as has been richly evident to the fact that the US, UK and Australia have forged a new AUKUS.

The fact remains that a tug of geopolitical supremacy runs between the US, China, and Russia.

—The writer, an independent 'IR' researcher-cum-international law analyst based in Pakistan, is member of European Consortium for Political Research Standing Group on IR, Critical Peace & Conflict Studies, also a member of Washington Foreign Law Society and European Society of International Law.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Bureaucracy and Society By Iftikhar Ahmad

The study of comparative administrations and case studies helps us understand bureaucracy and its various shades and consequences in terms of change in society and the issues of power and power play. The structure of bureaucracy reflects on behaviours and the need for norms desirable for a way forward.

The political challenge of the permanent civil service's strength and influence, with its own goals and traditions, was unimportant as long as the bureaucracy's social and economic principles and those of the ruling politicians did not clash. However, when a new political force gains office and proposes reforms that go outside the customary frame of reference of the prior governmental activity or disrupt the established system of ties with the bureaucracy, the problem becomes critical.

According to Max Weber, the absolute dictator is often entirely dependent on his bureaucracy. Unlike a democratic ruler, he has no way of knowing whether his plans are being implemented. In a democracy, the bureaucracy has less authority since the public keeps the ruling politicians informed. However, this assertion is only half-true because the public is only aware of a portion of the government's operations. Cabinet ministers are frequently denied access to areas of government operations that are not visible to the public. When a government department's consumers and civil personnel both disagree with the minister's ideas, there is a good chance that the policies will not be implemented. Clients and bureaucrats will try to persuade the minister that his approach is incorrect or correct.

Civil officials, of course, do not operate in a social vacuum; their views on relative "right" and "wrong," like those of all people, are shaped by the pressures present in their social environment. A department official is concerned not just with whether a minister's recommendations can be implemented but also with the impact of such policies on the department's conventional practices and long-term relationships with other organisations.

Elections will lose much of their relevance unless the people are allowed to change crucial experts and politicians.

Equally essential are government officials' assessments of the practicality of each idea, which are always influenced by their political views and the climate of thought in their social group. Humans, not robots, make up the bureaucracy. The desire to preserve a specific bureaucratic organisation is merely a complicated set of considerations that influences their decisions. Depending on its background, each group acts differently in a particular situation. The lack of a sociological perspective among political scientists has aided the reliance on a single theory of bureaucracy. They have mostly avoided raising concerns about the government administration's social origins and principles.

Political scientists have realised that the government bureaucracy substantially influences policymaking. However, they continue to leave the bureaucracy in a social vacuum. The activities of the bureaucrat are examined in light of the civil service's goals of self-preservation and efficiency. These concerns might be classified as preservation and efficiency. These interests could be defined in terms of prestige and privilege, the conservation of organisational patterns or links with a department, or the upholding of departmental traditions and policies. There is scant awareness that government officials' behaviour is influenced by the non-governmental social background and interests of individuals in charge of the bureaucracy. Civil servants belong to a variety of non-governmental social organisations and classes. Individual conduct is mostly determined by social influences stemming from a variety of group memberships and loyalties. An individual's or a group's behaviour in a specific situation cannot be viewed as if the individuals or group members had no other life outside of the studied events.

Only when a "radical" party takes power does it become necessary to address the problem of bureaucratic opposition to change. When the state's overall goals later, the principle of civil-service neutrality breaks down. The socialist state aims to reintegrate societal values, prioritise underserved groups in government services, and secure significant government control. The initiative may fall short of its goals if it places administrative power in the hands of men whose social background and previous training prevent them from empathising with the new government's goals. "Men of "push and go," enthusiastic innovators, and hard-driving managers will be required by the planned state...men who are fully devoted to the goal the state is undertaking to serve."

There was no simple solution to the challenge of maintaining government administration affectionately yet also sensitive to the voters' desire during the

American New Deal period in the 1930s. The current government's increased power, functions, and sheer bulk necessitate the search for a way to control the bureaucracy. "The question is always who controls the existing bureaucratic machinery," Max Weber said.

Today, the government is a large-scale administrative undertaking that necessitates the use of professionals. Elections will lose much of their relevance unless the people are allowed to change crucial experts and politicians. This challenge will become increasingly prominent as efforts are made to strengthen the state's economic and social welfare role.

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

Balancing Ties With Washington & Beijing Will Not Be Easy For Pakistan | Editorial

A DAY after the Foreign Office said that Pakistan did not mind engaging with the US "on a range of issues" though "at an opportune time", Prime Minister Imran Khan added clarity to the reason behind the government's decision not to participate in Washington's Summit for Democracy.

After referring to CPEC as a glorious opportunity at the Islamabad Conclave 2021 yesterday, the prime minister went on to say that Pakistan should not be part of any bloc as the world heads towards a new Cold War — this one primarily involving China and the US. Mr Khan was absolutely correct in sounding the alarm: diplomatic neutrality is compromised when countries get involved in bloc politics that aims to undercut ideological or economic rivals.

The lessons of being part of the anti-communist blocs Seato and Cento should not be lost on Pakistan. Perhaps there was also a realisation of the danger in taking sides when in 2015, parliament, to its credit, refused to involve the country in the Saudi-led campaign inside war-torn Yemen.

But can the Summit for Democracy — a one-off event — be described as an international bloc? Certainly, the rivalry is clear as China and Russia were left out and Taiwan, Beijing's bête noire, was invited by the US. However, among the

over 100 participants are also countries that have normal ties with those whom Washington deems its rivals.

Pakistan could have attended the virtual summit — perhaps even raised the prime minister's point about guarding against divisive international blocs from that very platform to make its stance clear, putting paid to any hopes that it was inclined to favour one party over the other. In an increasingly polarised world, open communication between states is crucial to forging a common agenda for democracy — both domestically and in interstate relations. Many countries like Pakistan know the dangers of despotic rule only too well. Spreading this awareness and enlisting global support for democratic rule and trust-building between nations can deter the authoritarian elements forever waiting in the wings.

For Pakistan, balancing its ties with Washington and Beijing will not be easy. If the current developments are anything to go by, the Sino-American confrontation may get uglier. Tensions are already intensifying as the US, together with Canada, the UK and Australia, is officially boycotting the 2022 Winter Olympic Games (although the athletes will attend) in China over the latter's alleged human rights violations. Pakistan will need to make intelligent, and at times tough, decisions in order to maintain a neutral posture. There are many factors which will constrain such attempts, among them this country's dependency on foreign funds and investment, something which is often taken advantage of in international relations. Even so, it must find the strength to resist any temptation or pressure to root for one country at the expense of another.

Published in Dawn, December 10th, 2021

Energy Reforms | Editorial

PAKISTAN'S energy sector is in a total mess, riddled with shortages, inefficiencies, massive debt, dependence on imported fossil fuels etc. We have consolidated different energy-related ministries and institutions under one ministry but failed to develop a comprehensive and integrated policy for ensuring national energy security. The lack of a well-defined national energy strategy also means the absence of a proper mechanism for coordination among different entities, which mostly work in silos and often in opposite directions. Thus, the government has never been able to do more than firefight at times of crises. Not only is this a serious threat to Pakistan's fragile economy and energy security, it also imposes massive additional costs on the consumers.

Take the example of the power sector. The country has dramatically enhanced its generation capacity over the last few years. Yet frequent blackouts continue because we did not invest in the distribution infrastructure to evacuate power from the plants to consumers. Likewise, we have unused, surplus LNG re-gasification capacity — which can be increased significantly in no time — at the two terminals in Karachi. But the government's reluctance to allow them third-party access is keeping us from increasing imports to meet gas shortfalls in the winter. Hence, we see massive gas rationing for various sectors as temperatures fall. The authorities' unwillingness to implement politically unpopular policy changes to address the worsening situation means that no company is prepared to invest capital in local oil and gas exploration. The story of local oil refineries operating at 60pc-65pc of their capacity is no different as the government imports refined products at the expense of precious foreign exchange.

So it would not be incorrect to point out that our energy troubles are more complex than they appear to be, and are more rooted in bad governance and lack of political will than supply shortages alone. In the late 2000s and the first half of the 2010s, energy shortages were estimated to have cost the country up to 4pc of GDP, forcing hundreds of factories to close down and leaving tens of thousands of workers jobless. Sadly, the economy is paying this price even today in spite of investments of billions of borrowed dollars in generation capacity under CPEC. Resolving the energy crisis requires much more than implementing supply-side fixes. The public energy sector cannot be repaired without deep governance and management reforms to remove inefficiencies and plug

leakages. Nevertheless, reforms will not help overcome energy troubles unless there is competition from private parties and significant public investments are made in infrastructure. Indeed, the task is not easy as it will involve many politically unpopular decisions. But this bitter pill will have to be swallowed for the sake of the nation's economy and the consumers. The government can start by developing an integrated energy policy with clearly defined goals and milestones.

Published in Dawn, December 13th, 2021

Paradigm Shift in Pak-Russia Relations By

Sehrish Khan

IN the last two decades, the attitude of the developed nations, especially in bilateral relations, has undergone such dramatic changes that they could not have been imagined some time ago.

Relationships based on hostility and confrontation have turned into relationships of friendship and cooperation.

Countries that once had strictly closed their borders to neighbouring states are now not only having good trade relations but also having cultural exchanges and economic cooperation between them.

How was this transformation possible in the world politics? The reason behind the conflicts was artificial system devised by the great powers to keep nations away from each other, which they imposed on the world, strictly unnaturally, on the basis of “ideology”.

The system was called the Cold War, in which the (former) Soviet Union and the US, the two great powers that conquered Germany and Japan in the World War-II, divided the world.

With this division, the two countries became “superpowers”, while nearly 200 other countries of the world remained mired in poverty and backwardness.

However, the unexpected collapse of the “Berlin Wall” in 1989 ushered in a series of political upheavals in Europe that eventually led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the “Cold War”.

While the end of the Cold War forced almost all countries of the world to make necessary changes in their foreign and defence policies, the Soviet Union and present-day Russia also had to reconsider its relations with the outside world, especially with its neighbours.

The environment, which has been created internationally since the end of the Cold War, has certainly played a significant role in the growing cooperation between Pakistan and Russia in various fields.

During the “Cold War”, close and friendly relations between Pakistan and Soviet Union did not develop because both of these countries were in opposite camps.

As India was closed ally of Russia at that time but as usual India’s friendship is limited to its personal gains so, she changed her focused (arms deal) from Russia to US and Russia got free to develop its relations with any country it want.

As in recent years, both countries have made efforts to bury their bitter past and open a new chapter in bilateral ties.

To strengthen strategic ties of Pakistan-Russia, Joint Military Consultative Committee was established in 2018 to support Pakistan-Russia bilateral military cooperation.

Russian warships participated in the 45-nation AMAN-21 Biennial Naval exercises hosted by Pakistan in Arabian Sea in February 2021.

In November 2020, Russian Special Operations troops held joint drills with their Pakistani counterparts in the Friendship 2020 exercises at the Tarbela training ground KP.

Moreover, US President Donald Trump ended Pakistan’s participation in its international military education programme. Pakistan signed a security training agreement with Moscow for training of military officers in Russia.

Whereas, the recent visit of Pakistan NSA, Moeed Yusuf to Moscow, will further pave the way in strengthening their relations as Pakistan and Russia have shared a similar view on Afghanistan, both countries have sought engagement with the Taliban government.

They also urged the United States to unfreeze \$9.5 billion assets of the Afghan Central Bank.

However, Washington is using Afghan foreign assets as leverage over the Taliban to make them meet international expectations.

Both Russia and Pakistan are worried that the economic collapse of Afghanistan may allow terrorist groups to gain a foothold in Afghanistan. Russia is particularly concerned over the threat posed by Daesh in Afghanistan.

The visit of Moeed Yusuf was part of increased exchanges between the two countries in view of the changing regional situation. Russia is close to signing a deal with Pakistan to lay a gas pipeline from Karachi to Lahore.

Similarly, Russia, which has remained a strong ally and arms supplier of India, is also keen to deepen defence ties with Pakistan.

Interestingly, Moeed's visit comes just days before Russian President Vladimir Putin is due to visit India and the timing of his visit suggests that Putin's visit may also come up in the discussions.

In April 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Islamabad and conveyed a message from President Putin that Russia was ready to extend all possible help to Pakistan and agreed to remain engaged on all matters of mutual importance.

After sketching the whole picture, with concluding remarks, I would say that Pakistan has a significant role in the emerging geopolitical chessboard in Eurasia owing to its geopolitical location, strong military with advancing nuclear capability and considerable influence in the Islamic world.

As far as westward connectivity is concerned, CPEC is one of the key future gateways which would help Pakistan to join CARs, Russia and Eurasia to our warm waters.

—The writer is contributing columnist.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Major Power Relationships in Pakistan's Neighbourhood **By Shahid Javed Burki**

The full significance of developing geopolitics in Pakistan's neighborhood needs to be grasped by those responsible for making foreign policy in Islamabad. At the international level, geopolitics is the study of foreign policy to understand, explain and predict international political behaviour through geographical variables. These include area studies, national strategic interests, topography, demography and climate of the region being studied. Looked at foreign policymaking from this perspective, we see significant changes occurring in Pakistan's immediate neighborhood. The regime change in Kabul is of obvious interest for Pakistan but so should be the evolving relations among four large states — China, India, Russia and the United States. Two of these are Pakistan's neighbours.

The week of December 4 brought a number of developments that Pakistan should be watching carefully. There were high level contacts between Russia and India on the one side and the United States and Russia on the other. The first of these involved a visit by Russia's President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi, the Indian capital. The visit to Delhi was the first foreign trip taken by the Russian leader in several months. The second was the telephone call made by Joe Biden, the American President, to discuss Russia's moves involving Ukraine. Biden's call to Putin was made after careful review by senior American officials of developing relations with Putin's Russia.

On December 6, India and Russia announced expanding defence ties between the two countries that included the purchase by New Delhi of the highly sophisticated missile defence system, the S-400. It is one of the most advanced defence systems in the world, having the ability to reach multiple targets as far as 250 miles from its location. It is also more affordable, costing half of that of the US Patriot system. Indian military officials have called it a 'booster dose', using the term that had gained currency in the use of vaccines to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Indians have struggled to modernise their defence systems because of financial constraints. This is the same system the Turkish government purchased in 2017 which led to the near severing of relations between Ankara and Washington. In 2020, the Trump administration issued sanctions against Turkey for going outside the NATO system for making

important defence purchases. The Indians were betting that that would not happen in their case since China was a factor in the way the Americans would look at the Moscow-Delhi deal. “S-400 deal doesn’t have only a symbolic meaning,” Russian Foreign Sergei Lavrov was quoted as saying. “It has a very important practical meaning for an Indian defense capability.”

India has had a long-established defence relationship with Russia which dates back to the days of the Cold War. At that time, India had proclaimed itself to be a ‘non-aligned’ nation which really meant not getting close to the United States that was busy crafting a number of defence pacts India wanted to stay out of. India was then led by the long-serving Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who was very impressed by the Soviet-style economic system. He believed that the Communists had found a way of achieving two objectives that were dear to him: a high rate of economic growth and better distribution of wealth and incomes. It was shown by a number of scholars that in fact neither of these two objectives had been achieved by the Soviet Union.

In welcoming Putin to Delhi, Prime Minister Modi said that “in the last few decades, several fundamentals have changed” — no doubt referring to the rapid rise of China and the emergence of the Taliban-led government in Kabul, Afghanistan. “New geopolitical angles have emerged. Amidst all such variables, Indo-Russian friendship has been constant.”

In addition to the S-400 missile defence system, Moscow and Delhi signed a \$600 million deal to locally manufacture hundreds of thousands of Russian AK-203 rifle which would be made by a joint public sector enterprise located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, a highly priced political space for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bhartiya Janata Party. The AK-203 would replace the older Kalashnikov rifle which was a standard issue for the Indian soldiers. Modernisation of India’s defence capability was overseen by General Bipin Rawat, the country’s defence chief. He was killed in a helicopter crash on December 8.

The second move involving Russia was made by President Joe Biden when, on Tuesday December 7, he had a long telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin. The subject of the call were two fears: on the part of Russia the United States and its allies were boxing it in by using Ukraine that had a long border with Russia and was once an important part of the Soviet Union. Putin was of the view that Ukraine posed a threat to Moscow. The other fear was on the part of

the West. The American intelligence community had concluded that Putin had massed his country's troops on Ukraine's eastern border to attack it in the early part of 2022.

In the two-hour-long conversation, Biden was direct and gave a clear message that any such action would result in sanctions that would personally hurt Putin and his close associates and completely isolate his country. Russia would not be able to use the international system to do any financial transactions. Its access to SWIFT code used by banks to do business with one another would be totally blocked. In the press briefing given by Jake Sullivan, the American National Security Advisor, it was indicated that the American president came away with the impression that the Russian leader had not made up his mind whether he would order the invasion of Ukraine. After the conversation with Putin, Biden called major European leaders and briefed them what had transpired in the talk. This time around, the West was not going to sit idly by as it did in 2014 when Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed the Crimean Peninsula. The only major action taken then was to remove Russia from the membership of the Group of Eight, the G8.

In the post-conversation statements, it was not indicated whether the two leaders also discussed Afghanistan. Putin made his first public comments on the Afghan situation at a joint press conference on August 22, 2021 in Moscow with Angela Merkel who was preparing to retire as German Chancellor, a job she had held for several years. He said that he knows Afghanistan well and understood that it was counterproductive to impose external forms of government. "Any such sociopolitical experimentation has never been crowned with success and only lead to the destruction of states, and degradation of their political and social systems." He said that "it is necessary to stop the irresponsible policy of imposing other people's values from outside, the desire to build democracy in other countries, not taking into account either historical, national and religious characteristics, and completely ignoring the traditions by which people live." He was speaking not just about what Americans and the West had attempted to do in Afghanistan but had in mind the interference in the countries of Eastern Europe that were once part of the Soviet Union.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 13th, 2021.

Journey Since Independence By Abbas Nasir

DOES the name Shaukat Ahmed Ghani mean anything to you? In all likelihood you have never heard of the young Kashmiri student who has spent the past two months in a jail in the Indian city of Agra where he was studying civil engineering.

Two of his fellow engineering students from India-occupied Kashmir, Inayat Altaf Sheikh and Arshad Yusuf, are also facing sedition charges. Their crime: their WhatsApp status was applauding and supporting the Pakistan team when it defeated India in the T20 World Cup last October.

All three are currently being held in Agra prison with local lawyers refusing to accept their brief because they committed a “crime against the motherland”. A governing BJP official told the BBC that the three are in custody because of fear of ‘disturbances’.

At their last hearing, BJP activists tried to assault them as police led them to a vehicle to transport them back to jail and raised slogans against them and Pakistan. One can be reasonably sure Gandhi and Nehru would have (metaphorically) turned in their final resting place.

The one politician who’d be pleased with this no end would be the Conservative peer Lord Tebbit who’d coined the phrase ‘The Tebbit test’ for those South Asian and Caribbean Britons who cheered cricket teams from their old countries on tour rather than England.

There seems to be intense competition among the three most populated South Asian countries to trample on freedoms.

Tebbit advanced his theory in 1990 and maintained that those who failed to pass the Tebbit Test were not “significantly integrated” into Britain and asked them: “Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?”

This of course put the onus of integration into Britain, and in a sense loyalty, on the immigrants and their children and not on the British government which failed to make take concrete steps to integrate them for years. In many cases, two generations of immigrants have spent their entire lives ghettoised.

However, having often failed the Tebbit Test in my nearly two decades in the UK, nobody imprisoned me or tried to lynch me for supporting the 'wrong cricket team' or for not supporting England in the football World Cup. In any case, England football's performance in the international arena does not make it easy to be its fans.

Attitudes and prejudices in a former colonial power are hardly the issue here anyway, but 70 years on from independence, the state of freedom in our own societies is. Despite oppression in Kashmir and the denial of the Kashmiris' rights since 1947, more generally the state of democracy and free speech in India remained much better than, say, in Pakistan and, since 1971, Bangladesh too.

But as we speak, there seems to be intense competition among the three most populated South Asian countries to trample on media freedoms, and curtail free speech and political freedoms. In India, the oppression the Kashmiris have been familiar with is now being rolled out everywhere in the country.

Images of BJP supporters setting upon rights protesters in New Delhi and then expanding their attacks on the Muslim minority community in the capital; and Muslims being lynched on suspicion of transporting beef in different parts of Uttar Pradesh, which has a saffron-clad preacher as its chief executive, with the police largely remaining either complicit or being helpless bystanders are just two examples.

Many Pakistanis appear very smug when they see human rights being trampled upon in India and forget we have an elected member of the National Assembly, Ali Wazir, jailed without trial for over a year now because he dared to criticise those allegedly committing excesses on the very people they are assigned to protect.

After nearly a year in prison, he was granted bail by the Supreme Court of Pakistan but a couple of weeks later, he is still to see the light of day and breathe freely. He remains confined to his dark, dingy cell in the Karachi Central Jail.

Ali Wazir lost 17 members of his immediate family to the TTP when the terror group enjoyed free rein in the erstwhile Fata and, to be honest, even if the most

powerful institution in the country was upset at his remarks, a little compassion, understanding and tolerance would not have been out of place.

But no. A demand has been murmured in the presence of journalists that Ali Wazir could be freed if he apologised. The response of the proud Pakhtun was too strong to be detailed here for fear of recrimination but suffice it to say he refused.

Whether Pakistan or Bangladesh, power is never shared in proportion to your rightful share in the people's mandate. Machinations and manipulation undermine the democratic will of the people and the more power is usurped by whosoever is able to.

Jailing political opponents, who might provide a check on your arbitrary use and abuse of power and question you in parliament, is routinely resorted to as are legal cases to influence the outcome of elections. This, where outright rigging may not be possible.

In India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and even Sri Lanka, free media is anathema to the power brokers as a vibrant, free media can expose the designs of those who see democracy and its principles as a huge inconvenience, an obstacle to their ambitions, and are ever-willing to contemptuously disregard them.

Cases against journalists, arrests of media practitioners and outright physical threats and intimidation apart from choking the lifelines of media groups by blocking even private advertising streams are just some of the tools used across South Asia.

What a place to be nearly three-fourth of a century after independence, which was won with such huge hopes, ideals, goals and ambitions for creating societies not answerable to a distant colonial master but to the people who would be their own masters through their elected representatives and institutions.

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Areas of Cooperation Between the US and Pakistan By Maheen Shafiq

SINCE the withdrawal of the US/NATO forces from Afghanistan, US-Pakistan relations are standing on the edge of a cliff and at crossroads.

Nevertheless, despite the undesired agitation between the two nations, there is still room for cooperation over several subjects where their mutual interests converge.

These subjects could be cooperation to counter transnational terrorism, arms control, trade, media, education, democracy and climate change. In fact, these areas could become a foundation for realignment of this relationship.

Since the fall of Kabul, there is an undeniable threat of the rise of terrorism in Afghanistan feared in Washington and Islamabad.

This looming threat could be from IS-Khorasan (IS-K), Al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah. The prevailing perception in Pakistan is that domestic like-minded groups could take inspiration, funding and training from these groups.

While on the other hand, the vacuum in Afghanistan could give transnational terrorist groups a fertile ground to breed. Under such circumstances, a rapid rise of terrorism could impact the US National Security Strategy as well as threaten Pakistan's national security.

To counter these threats, the US can engage with Pakistan's National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA). Furthermore, the two states can coordinate efforts in devising a strategy, training, intelligence and technology sharing to counter transnational terrorism.

In addition to terrorism, Pakistan and the US could put in efforts towards arms control in the region.

It is part of the US' National Security Strategy to re-engage with Russia to cater to the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Countries in the South Asian region have been building their offensive capability aggressively.

This build-up could cause miscalculations and unintended escalation. The level of miscalculation also increases due to emerging technologies, such as AI and cyber, being incorporated into offensive and defensive capabilities.

Moreover, hypersonic ambitions also add complexities to strategic stability in the region and could impact the deterrence calculus gravely.

Pakistan, despite the precarious security situation of the region, has been making efforts to develop economically. This offers vast potential for bilateral trade and economic cooperation. The US is Pakistan's largest export destination and one of the country's top five investors.

Data released by the State Bank of Pakistan showed that during the first quarter of the fiscal year (July-Sept FY22), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the US was five times higher than China. This indicates that the US investment has not died down despite the ongoing Chinese projects in Pakistan.

Notwithstanding the antagonistic relations between the US and China, Pakistan has attempted to maintain a balanced approach towards the two and it remains open for business for both countries.

Furthermore, the two states can also enhance cooperation in news and journalism. Given the rise of misinformation, fake news and deep fakes, it would be ideal to strengthen communication in order to avoid the fabrication of narratives.

For this purpose, the two governments can improve cooperation through journalism exchange programs, partnerships and workshops. In addition to this, according to research conducted by Google and Kantar, Pakistan's internet penetration stands at 54% in major cities.

This presents an opportunity for Silicon Valley's giants such as Facebook (aka Meta), Twitter, Amazon and so on to enhance their business linkages here. This opportunity can further add value if local offices are set up in various Pakistani cities.

Lastly and most importantly, climate change is seen as a national security threat in the US. Similarly, climate change and its adverse impact on food security are important for Pakistan as it is an agrarian country.

Pakistan actively participated in COP26 and put forth a realistic goal to cut emissions by 50% and make the shift to renewable energy by 2030.

Its drive towards forestation is now widely recognized. Both countries can learn from each other's best practices in the areas of mitigation and adaptation.

However, in order to work together in these areas, it would be essential that an accommodating and broad-minded approach be adopted. Both states view their relations through the lens of China, India or Afghanistan.

Pakistan assesses its relations with the US based on how intimate Washington is with New Delhi and similarly, the US analyzes its relations with Islamabad based on Pak-Sino coziness.

Afghanistan is the third triad between the two. If the US and Pakistan continue to view their relations through the lens of other states, complexities would continue to add up turning the relationship into a triangle to square to hexagon, rather than a straight line.

Therefore, in order to strengthen bilateral ties, external third-party noises need to be muted and a collaborative effort to achieve mutual goals needs to be put in place.

—The writer is a researcher at Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Why is Biden Ignoring Pakistan? By Shahid Javed Burki

There is now plenty of evidence in the way the administration headed by President Joe Biden is handling United States' relations with the world outside. He and his officials are focused much more on Southeast Asia than on the western part of the continent or on the Middle East. America is out of Afghanistan, has distanced itself from Turkey and is openly snubbing Pakistan. Imran Khan, Pakistan's Prime Minister, is the only major world leader Biden has not talked to on the telephone. Islamabad has not been visited by any senior American official who is close to President Biden. India, instead, is the focus of considerable attention by the US administration. It is the most important part of what is now called the Indo-Pacific Area strategy.

Secretary of State Antony J Blinken paid a short visit to East Asia which included stopovers in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. He cut short his visit upon arriving in Bangkok, the last leg of his trip. That had to be done as a member of the staff traveling with him tested positive for Covid-19. While recognising that China had developed strong ties with many countries in the region, the United States also had a significant presence. America has more members of its military stationed in the Indo-Pacific region than anywhere outside the contiguous United States. Blinken's main message was that his country was committed to "peace and security" that is "vital to prosperity in the region". The region is by far the most integrated with the world than any other geographic space. This implies that there should be few constraints on the movement of goods. But, according to the Secretary of State, China poses a threat to open trade in the region where an estimated \$3 trillion of commerce flows every year.

In the speech delivered on December 14 at Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Blinken recalled that it was also the site 60 years ago of an address by Robert Kennedy who spoke then of open relations among states, so long as one did not threaten the rights of others. The Secretary of State said it was remarkable that the broader goal had changed so little for a region that in 2021 accounted for 60 per cent of the global economy and was growing faster than any other place in the world. The Secretary defined the region beginning with India in the northwest and Japan and South Korea in the northeast. America's policymakers and policy

analysts call the region Indo-Pacific. Pakistan was excluded from this definition whereas China was the heavyweight in the region. It overshadowed US in trade in most countries. In Southeast Asia alone, two-way trade with China reached \$685 billion in 2020, more than double that of the region's trade with the United States.

China's Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI, launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping is aimed at building infrastructure like ports, railway lines and roads in this region as well as in Africa and southern part of Europe. Italy, for instance, had parted company with other European Nations and invited China to revive the port of Trieste. When completed, this port will link with the port of Gwadar in Pakistan. The two ports would carry most of the merchandise imported and exported by China to the world outside.

"We all have a stake in ensuring that the world's most dynamic region is free from coercion and accessible to all," Blinken emphasised in his address. "This is good for people across the region and it's good for Americans, because history shows that when this vast region is free and open, America is more secure and prosperous." However, this vision had an Achilles heel. China was investing much more than the United States; the BRI would link it with most countries in the region. According to Jonathan R Stromseth, a Southeast Asia expert and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, this competition with China risks that "a bipolar divide is hardening for the long term with potentially serious consequences for regional stability and development". Many countries in the region are wary of being drawn into Cold War standoff between the United States and China. In November, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that he was uncomfortable with Biden's calls to persuade leaders from democracies to present a more unified front against China. "We all want to work together with the US," said Lee, but "I think not very many countries would like to join a coalition against those who have been excluded, chief of whom would be China." He was referring to the list of countries the United States had invited to attend the summit of democracies. China and Russia were not invited.

Blinken took note of this competition. "We don't want conflict in the Indo-Pacific." Yet he described "much concern" in the region over Beijing's actions which he said had distorted world trade with state-subsidised products, limited trade by its adversaries and engagement in illegal fishing. "Countries across the region want this behavior to change. We do too." Blinken's main message was that the United

States is a better bet as a partner. He used several examples to show that his country was making investments without seeking political return. He noted a \$500 million commitment to help finance a solar manufacturing facility in India as among efforts to help the region stave off environmental crises without disrupting economies. He pledged to introduce agreements to bolster data privacy and secure technology used in economic transactions “because if we don’t shape them others will”. Across Southeast Asia, private investments by the United States amounted to \$328.5 billion, outpacing China. But with China the comparison is not valid since it has small private sector compared to America.

Although Blinken did not touch upon his country’s relations with Russia, he noted that when he landed at Jakarta’s airport, he noticed that a Russian government plane was already parked on the tarmac. He was told that the plane had brought President Vladimir Putin’s senior aide Nikolai Patrushev. “I can’t or won’t speak to why anyone else might be here,” he responded when asked why he thought that a high level Russian official was in Jakarta at precisely the time when they would have known that he would be in the Indonesian capital. Blinken was also asked to give his views on widespread corruption in the region and whether that would impact progress towards creating more democratic institutions. He dodged the question.

Blinken’s Jakarta speech was well received by some who commented on it from Indonesia. Tom Lembong, who was once Indonesia’s trade minister, said it hit the bull’s eye on what policymakers across the region want “which is concrete and practical solutions, and less of soaring rhetoric that has dominated American official engagement with Southeast Asia”.

Pakistan’s relations with the United States should be seen in the context of developments in Afghanistan. The liberal opinion in the United States has never cared particularly for Pakistan; Islamabad’s close relationship with the Taliban was one of the reasons for the liberal communities’ reservations about Pakistan. In his first tweet of the year 2018 after he had been in office for less than a year, President Donald Trump used very harsh language for Pakistan. After taking office on January 2021, President Joe Biden called most important world leaders. Prime Minister Imran Khan was not one of those who were called, a fact that was noted in Pakistan with considerable dismay. This was evident once again as President Biden began to prepare for a “democracy summit” he had promised during the campaign for the US presidency. The summit was held but took the virtual form. Although Pakistan was invited it chose not to attend as China, which was Islamabad’s closest partner, was excluded.

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India, Pakistan Relations Likely to Remain Thorny: Experts

When India and Pakistan in a surprise announcement early this year agreed to a cease-fire along the disputed Kashmir border, it was believed that the months ahead would see a thaw in the relations between the two South Asian nuclear-armed neighbours.

But as the year comes to an end, there has been no major breakthrough.

Relations between India and Pakistan plummeted to a new low after August 2019, when New Delhi scrapped the longstanding special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), prompting Islamabad to downgrade its diplomatic ties with New Delhi.

In November this year, when India hosted a dialogue on Afghanistan, Pakistan's National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf announced that he would not attend the meeting.

"Bilateral relations are likely going to stay the same in 2022 and may further get complicated because of the upcoming domestic political events in both countries such as the 2023 general elections in Pakistan and state polls in India," said Sarral Sharma, a New Delhi-based security analyst.

Sharma, who has also served in the National Security Council Secretariat which advises the prime minister on key issues, told Anadolu Agency that the status quo would remain.

"Terrorism and Kashmir issue will continue to remain the bone of contention. The status quo should likely remain intact unless an untoward incident, like a big terror attack in India, will lead to further complications in the ties," he said.

Islamabad has been maintaining the normalisation of ties with New Delhi is linked to a review of the Aug 5 decision and ultimate resolution of the Kashmir dispute. In August 2019, India scrapped the special status of IIOJK and unilaterally bifurcated the erstwhile state in two union territories.

Soumya Awasthi, an associate fellow at the New Delhi-based Vivekananda International Foundation, told Anadolu Agency that a number of decisions taken by Pakistan recently have further complicated the relations, with little chances of improvement expected in 2022.

"Pakistan initially denied trade passage to the civil aid that India wanted to send to Kabul during the Covid-19 peak period and Pakistan not allowing the air passage for Kashmir and Sharjah flight and skipping of NSA's meet by Pakistan.

"Hence, India-Pakistan relations will continue to be bitter and the hope of having any positive change is a tricky thing to expect," she said.

'Afghanistan battleground'

According to analysts, the situation in Afghanistan may create more friction between the two neighbours in the future.

"The return of the Taliban has put Pakistan in de facto control of Afghanistan. This has created some unease in Delhi since it has lost a significant space and influence in Afghanistan after the return of the Taliban," said Sharma, adding that Pakistan seems to be in the "driver's seat" on all matters in Afghanistan.

He said India, on the other hand, is also actively discussing the situation in Afghanistan, especially issues of governance, terrorism, and human rights concerns. "It is apparent that both countries have different priorities vis a vis Afghanistan," he said.

"That will likely create frictions between India and Pakistan in the near future, as we have seen in the recent case of how Islamabad put conditions on India's attempt to send humanitarian aid to Afghanistan via land route through Pakistan."

Awasthi said 2022 is expected to be eventful "in the sense that there will be some progress on the situation in Afghanistan".

"India should be able to ensure regional support at the diplomatic level which will not only keep Pakistan in check but also strengthen its ties with other neighboring countries," she said. "When India offered civil aid in the month of

October-November, Taliban regime welcomed the support and also from time to time it has been respectful towards India's sentiment over Kashmir."

Major events in 2021

This year will also be remembered as the year for farmers' struggle against the three new laws, which were finally repealed by the Indian parliament on Nov 30.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan camped outside Delhi for a year, demanding that the laws be withdrawn. The farmers said the laws will threaten their livelihoods and benefit large corporations and industrialists.

On Jan 26, on the day of the country's Republic Day as farmers decided to hold a separate Republic Day parade, heavy clashes between the farmers and police happened at several places in New Delhi, with the situation worsening in Central Delhi where farmers managed to enter the historical Red Fort.

Indian government finally had to repeal the laws to end the agitation by the farmers, which saw one of the biggest challenges Prime Minister Narendra Modi has faced since coming to power in 2014.

India also came under the grip of the deadly pandemic with daily cases crossing 400,000. Deaths were reported nationwide as many hospitals ran out of oxygen supplies.

Moreover, the minorities in the country continued to bear the brunt of hate crimes amid rising intolerance.

Right-wing Hindutva groups disrupted Christmas celebrations at a number of places in India.

"Religious minorities are facing a threat," Niyaz Farooqui, secretary of Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, India's largest socio-religious Muslim organisation, told Anadolu Agency. "In 2021, there was no decline, and organisations and individuals were threatened by Hindutva groups and the problem seems to be aggravating."

Source: Published in Express Tribune

National Security Policy and Economic Diplomacy By Prof Shazia A Cheema

TWO important pieces of news came from Pakistan this week that need academic review because people like me who live abroad and wish to see a prosperous motherland they left behind for getting a higher education and desire to serve their country once back at home.

The first news was that Pakistan's first-ever National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-2026 was approved by the National Security Council (NSC), putting economic security at the core. The second news was that Pakistan is seriously working on Economic Diplomacy.

Nevertheless, details of NSP are not available but it is reported by newspapers that Pakistan, through NSP, will shift to a Comprehensive National Security Framework for achieving overall national security, safety, and dignity of the citizens of Pakistan.

As a part of my studies, I keep following the security's dynamics of developing countries and understand that food security through water security is a must for the survival of nations having large populations and comparative thin masses.

Pakistan is almost at the top of this sensitive list. The current population of Pakistan is 227.24 million (based on Worldometer-UN data).

The population density has gone up to 287 persons per Km² and 35.1 % of the population is urban. Around 63% population comprises the youth aged between age 15 and 33 (UN Population Fund Report 2017) and one can see at roads and traffic signals how educated, decent and well-mannered is our youth.

I support the statement of Prime Minister Imran Khan that our security rests in the security of its citizens but my question is that can we ensure the security of our citizens without securing our water resources and managing population growth? Remember history testifies that many nations imploded within and they did not need any external enemy to invade them.

Unplanned population growth, horizontal civic growth that is eating out agricultural lands for housing schemes, unskilled and aggressive youth, depilating food resources and the huge trade imbalance is more dreadful enemies than any external one.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has been raising his voice that corruption is the biggest issue of the country but I suggest he should review the list of dangers being faced by Pakistan.

How many vocational/technical education institutes does Pakistan have to convert the threat of inappropriate population growth into strength? What value addition do we have to introduce in our agriculture sector and education sector?

I have been teaching in Pakistan for many years and know that our syllabus is too obsolete and outdated that cannot provide new thoughts, out-of-box perceptive power and futuristic vision to our students.

Even top educational institutions of Pakistan are using at least one-decade old curriculum while taking the same fee for a semester that is offered by European educational institutions. Visa for European countries for Pakistani students is one of the greatest problems for planning their educational future.

I had been studying in Denmark and now in the Czech Republic and I know our government does not help students to find admissions or visas abroad while several neighboring countries of Pakistan use all diplomatic resources to ensure the admission of their students to top educational institutions in Europe.

I believe when Prime Minister Imran Khan says that the security of the citizens will be focused on by NSP, he should include better and competitive education, capacity building, value addition and state help for students who are bright enough to find admission in a foreign educational institution should be included in NSP list.

Moreover, the government's efforts to promote Economic Diplomacy should also consider promising and bright students as "products" and must work for their placement in foreign educational institutions for their value addition and capacity building because foreign-educated students would bring new ideas and new

opportunities for Pakistan when they will be back home, they will get better jobs abroad and would send better remittances to Pakistan.

You can find mostly unskilled Pakistani labour in Europe having lower income strata while citizens of neighbouring countries are leading in high technology jobs and premier human development sectors.

The growing significance of geo-economics in international politics cannot be denied and if Pakistan is really serious in a paradigm shift from geopolitical contestation to geo-economic cooperation, it must invest in youth for value addition by accepting the fact that youth is an important “product”.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Missions abroad should help find educational opportunities for Pakistani students in the same manner they find what Pakistani products can be sold in their respective country of appointment.

In September 2021, I had an opportunity of attending a virtual conference of academicians from Europe and South Asia and came to know that our neighbouring South Asian countries invest in their students studying abroad as they invest in any industry or business for value addition. Why Pakistan cannot learn from its neighbours and follow this strategy?

—The writer is Prague-based foreign affairs expert and writes for national and international media outlets.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

ECONOMY

Economy: Misconceptions and Targeting **Relief By Dr Kamal Monnoo**

In a surprising move, the Ministry of Planning last week released some statistics that aim at downgrading the performance of not only its own co-Commerce Ministry, but also that of the national export sector. The report argues that while Pakistan's exports grew significantly in Dollar terms, the actual production of certain exportable items registered a sizable decrease, e.g. grey cloth in meterage, some unfinished MMF categories, etc. So, therefore the exporters have in fact failed the country despite being given massive government dole outs; that is whatever the term massive dole-outs or subsidies means? The only thing one can think of in terms of input costs is somewhat maintaining the electricity price, but then again it still stood slightly higher than some regional competitors and if what in effect is being recommended to arbitrarily jack up electricity tariff for exporters, then how anyone expects exports to compete internationally while having to absorb inefficiencies and corruption in the state-owned power sector is at least beyond my imagination! All other facilities like zero-rating, in-house bonded areas, etc. stand long gone with the sector today competing in an open-borders environment in compliance with the WTO principles. One is not even sure that why such a flawed report has a) been released and b) fails to take into account several key factors when making comparisons and drawing conclusions, because not only does it damage the industry's confidence, but even more dangerously can also lead the government in the wrong policy direction, which needless to say could be disastrous, especially for the health of the external account. The argument in the report that import contraction is undesirable and could further impact exports adversely is again a half-baked theory that assumes that the contraction being recommended by most economic analyst primarily aims at curtailing unnecessary and luxury imports while giving a free hand to goods that in-turn boost exports or enhance production capacities. Also, it is pertinent to note that Pakistan's export sector in fact has performed very well in Covid times, posting almost a 38 percent growth, even if at some places it is mainly price driven. Why? First, because it reflects

value-addition kicking in, something that one has been talking about since a long time and second, that on a comparative basis regionally and globally, it reflects a robust performance in a like-to-like period where thriving traditional export economies have faltered: Japan negative 15 percent, Czech Republic negative 20 percent, Hong Kong negative 17 percent, Indonesia negative 48 percent, Egypt negative 49 percent (a large textile exporting nation), France negative 17 percent, Brazil negative 28 percent, etc. Even the regional ones that have posted growth remain either comparable or below the Pakistani performance while also relying heavily on price driven growth: Bangladesh positive 25 percent, India positive 27 percent, whereas Sri Lanka remained negative 4 percent.

Nigeria confirms first cases of omicron variant

On to the more important thing then, which is; what can this government do to ensure that the fruits are equitably distributed and how to successfully harness the current buoyancy in the economy for the benefits to reach the bottom of the pyramid and that too quickly? Well, other than of course clamping an emergency on undesirable imports (above) and curtailing domestic manufacturing that stokes non-productive consumption on the back of imported components, it will do well by championing three key areas; One, tweaking its Covid stimulus efforts in a way that it directly targets SMEs (Small and Medium sized Enterprises), Two, ensuring that its infrastructure build or rebuild projects are ones that are fuelled only by local currency and not exposed to foreign exchange fluctuation, and Three, invest in human infrastructure to tangibly take advantage of a young population, which otherwise would turn into a liability rather than an asset. A good example here could be Joe Biden's recently announced stimulus package—a brainchild of Larry Summers—aimed at propelling the real GDP growth (it is almost now going at 5 percent in this running quarter) that in essence results in falling unemployment, the average household income going up, and the domestic retail sales registering an increase. However, the best part being that the lion's share of the \$1.90 trillion package directly engages the people's segment that is 'in official books' already way down the education and income ladders, and a host of businesses in retail, cottage scale operations, mom and pop stores, self-driven manufacturing and similar level enterprises that simply couldn't afford the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

NCOC announces free booster after six months of last vaccine dose

Likewise, it has been legislated that any infrastructure spending, which draws on this new stimulus bill needs to statistically correlate related justifications to

national productivity enhancement. However, no growth or heating up of an economy is without the pain of inflation. Like in Pakistan, US policymakers also face the same challenges, albeit the difference being that over there Larry Summers pre-empted this coming and provisioned accordingly. His argument being that a stimulus along with all the global supply chain disruptions and labour shortages that are inevitable when coming of a pandemic are bound to boost inflation. In addition, the simple public exhaustion due to grappling with this never-ending pandemic would mean a reduced resistance threshold of people in general to deal with a mounting inflation. And to overcome this resultant challenge where on one hand you are trying to put the economy on a recovery path while on the other you need to protect the people from rising prices and shortages, the only way is to direct all relief and resources (of the stimulus package) to the lower end of the pyramid and leaving very little or none for the ones at the top. So far, it seems to be working both for Larry Summers and the Democrats and perhaps this is exactly what the PTI government needs to ensure here in Pakistan as well.

Source: Published in The Nation

The Wages of the IMF By Durdana Najam

Despite having some of the best internationally recognised minds to manage Pakistan's financial affairs, why is there no exit from the economic woes? Is there a probability that these able minds have been working as the so-called economic hitmen to keep Pakistan financially bankrupt? This is not an illusion of a conspiratorial mind as the readers might be tempted to think. There are reasons for the doubt. For instance, take the case of the IMF's six billion dollar package. We have not even received half of the total package as the debt is released in bits and pieces. With every new tranche, a list of dos and don'ts is handed down for compliance. Being negotiated currently is a tranche worth \$1 billion. So far, the walk on the tightrope has been made possible with the massive devaluation of the rupee, high electricity and gas tariffs, elimination of Rs350 billion worth of subsidies, the reincarnation of petroleum levy by Rs33, cut in the development budget to the tune of Rs300 billion and imposition of new taxes. Soon a mini-budget will be floated to give a legal cover to these demands. According to experts, this will be one of the biggest mini-budgets in the history of Pakistan. How will this affect a common man? That is not on the agenda of the government economic wizards. What is on their hit list is compliance with the IMF demand.

Now let us talk about the illusion part.

As compared to the \$1 billion IMF tranche, which is so far behaving like a sinking boat that may tumble the country with it if not rescued, Pakistan has earned \$6 billion from textile export in the first four months of the current fiscal year. Juxtapose the part receipts of the IMF package with \$6 billion from only four months of textile export, and you will find yourself questioning the justification for the anxiety to keep the IMF boat afloat. With an industrial output sufficient to overcome the so-called current account deficit, why have we tied ourselves to the IMF programme, which for all its purposes is only tightening the noose around common men's neck? The question is: what justifies our eagerness to meet the IMF unjust demands for a \$1 billion tranche, especially when our economy has the potential to wade us out of solvency — if there is any?

Recently, Dr Arthur Betz Laffer, an American economist, was in Pakistan to attend Pakistan Prosperity Forum — 2021 arranged by the Prime Institute in Islamabad. During his address, he advised Pakistan's economic heads to refrain

from taking dictation from the IMF and the World Bank. Adding further to his anguish against the lending institutions, he said that the IMF and the World Bank have been of no use other than deliberately exacerbating Pakistan's economic woes. He reminded us that we were not their slaves and that we should act independently.

This advice of acting 'independently' brings to mind the ardent opposer of the IMF and the World Bank, Mr Yanis Varoufakis, a Greek-Australian economist and politician. He served as Greek Minister of Finance from January to July 2015. During his stint as finance minister, he refused to bend to the demands of the lending institutions and instead said that "...we are insolvent, and we have to embrace our insolvency."

Varoufakis equated these creditors with terrorists. Like terrorists, they instil fear and trepidation so that their targets bend and give in. The weapons used in this warfare are the economic experts drawn usually from the targeted countries. They deliberately make flawed policies. Each policy digs a hole in the exchequer. Eventually, a time comes when this leaking bucket becomes a burden to the community of greedy and expedient politicians, military personals and businessmen, who had been raised over the period to make this leaking bucket a reality. Later, each hole is patched from the creditor's debt in return for more taxes, exorbitant utility bills, and inflationary pressures.

Varoufakis met Barack Obama at the Greek Independence Day celebration in the East Room of the White House and was asked to "swallow bitter stuff" like he did to survive the 2008 economic crisis. Varoufakis replied, "You inherited a mess when you came to office, but at least you had your central bank behind you. We inherited a mess and we have a central bank" — the European Central Bank — "trying to choke us". The creditors wanted Greece "to privatize state assets, such as Athens's port; reform institutions and practices perceived to be inefficient, including its health-care and welfare systems, in ways likely to result in mass dismissals; and adjust its budget through further tax increases and spending cuts, to the point where Greece's income significantly exceeded its spending on everything but its repayments".

From Laffer to economic experts like Dr Ikramulhaq, government is advised to downgrade income and sales tax to widen the tax net. However, the government has no appetite to hear sane voices. Instead, it is fuelling the 134 non-functioning state-owned organisations with an annual injection of \$4 million. How does Pakistan's economic wizard justify this loss is anybody's guess.

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Rethinking Economic Equations By Dr

Kamal Monnoo

Amid all the wild swings in Pakistan's economic policymaking over almost the past three years, one thing has remained constant, repeated experimentation where none was needed. A cursory look at the economic history of nations that have made big over the last half century and the important and lucid commonality that literally stares one in the face is that almost all made it big on the back of exports.

Not going too far back, take the example of Bangladesh—our very own flesh and blood till 1971—the underlying reason for why they have left us behind in recent years is exports: Bangladesh's almost \$45 billion as compared to ours only \$25 billion. This single minded commitment of the Bangladeshis to connect into the developed world by becoming its preferred apparel supply-chain has in-turn helped them contain their population growth (only 165 million people as compared to our 230 million, whereas, we were the minority half, back in 1971); a refocused emphasis on education and skill development; micro-finance; women empowerment and with a per capita income today that is almost double that of ours.

PKR hits historic low in interbank intraday trade

And for us, despite the clear writing on the wall, we have still not been able to put our heart and soul in adopting the true spirit of an exporting culture or in fact declaring a kind of 'export emergency' in the country. Instead, finance ministers are changed repeatedly, new teams of economic advisors are inter-changed every couple of years and foreign experts are parachuted in regularly to run key financial institutions,; all ironically all with just one singular vision: Fiscal deficit. On working to the dictates of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) regardless of whether or not they suit the domestic ground realities.

Still, Pakistanis are a resilient lot and tend to rise against all odds. However, of late, just when one thought the Pak economy was again about to turn a corner, after a testing struggle of economic contraction as a result of both, governmental policies and a global Covid pandemic, in walks yet another IMF programme-resumption, one that regrettably aims at once again erode whatever little that had

been achieved over the last few months. Not surprisingly, nothing new in this programme either, as like its previous blueprints, this one also looks to raise taxes, tariffs and utility and input prices, thereby retarding growth, stoking inflation and damaging competitiveness (essentially for exports).

As for our economic managers, they seem all set to walk into another period of pain, the brunt of which is invariably borne by the people (through inflation and unemployment) and manufacturing businesses (through outright closures). The particular disappointment though in the recipe being handed down is that in today's environment, it just does not fit and naturally the advised IMF policy measures come across as being rather baffling.

The changed reality is that the quick outbreak of the global pandemic has all of a sudden forced the economists to have an altered view about the very economics of government debt per se. Gone are the days—at least for now—on the single-minded focus on fiscal deficit. Of late the echo on national debt and respective required thresholds as a percentage of GDP is all but dead. Even the latest narrative of the international financial institutions (such as the IMF) stands completely changed or just plays a totally different tune.

Sialkot lynching case: ATC approves 13-day physical remand of eight suspects
Only last month, talking to the G20, the much renowned former IMF chief economist, Olivier Blanchard, talked about a “shift in fiscal paradigm.” And this new paradigm suggests two things: One, that public debt is not a major problem anymore and two, that a government's borrowing for the right purposes is actually now the responsible thing to do. We have of late seen massive accumulation of debt and quantitative easing dole outs by the developed economies that in fact are being lauded today as the right things to do. So, why then play with a separate deck of cards when it comes to countries like Pakistan? Well, something for our government to ponder upon.

The other glaring area where the economic managers seem to be getting it wrong is in finding the equilibrium of competitiveness that will allow our exports to grow. Pakistan's is a complex work environment with excessive departmental oversight and where doing business is not easy by any stretch of imagination. So, naturally this has its own implications mainly that unless returns/profits are comparatively higher and return on investment quicker than average world economies, the investor is reluctant to invest.

Bigotry is what fuels the mob

This is the main reason that we have seen FDI (foreign Direct Investment), especially in the manufacturing sector that primarily creates jobs, almost dry up since June last year. Although this writer was against the Rupee devaluation initially undertaken—perhaps about 15-17 percent more than what was necessary at the time—the thing is that over time, markets and businesses automatically start adjusting themselves to the operational ground realities and this is exactly what happened here in Pakistan as well. Subsequent knee-jerk changes tend to become counterproductive. Going by the data of the previous one year, the abrupt devaluation finally started manifesting itself, even if only in the short-term, in competitive pricing of Pakistani products abroad, something that resulted in a surge of national exports and LSM (Large Scale Manufacturing) numbers from September 2020 onwards.

From an economy's perspective it could be fair to state that industries and businesses started working on the resultant equilibrium of costs and revenues—despite one of the highest interest rates in the region—giving Pakistan an advantage over its main competitors. For the government to capitalise on this temporary advantage it was imperative that it kept input prices in check to ensure that these short-term gains are turned into a sustainable operating model. To be able achieve this, what was essentially needed to be factored was that a breathing space is allowed for at least two years where domestic manufacturing could work on creating its own entrepreneurial efficiencies and productivity enhancements.

Sheikh Rashid asks opposition to shift long march schedule

Pakistan generally operates at around 7 percent higher inflation rate than its end markets and to keep the growth momentum, this differential either needs to be covered through currency devaluation or by lowering cost of capital and increasing productivity; naturally the latter is preferred. Sadly, of late the policy direction seems headed in the opposite direction with a brewing perception on continuity of the current high interest rates regime while the likelihood of burdening the cost of production with increased taxes and energy tariffs.

Also, with a strengthening PKR, albeit on the back of borrowing, the trend is not helping, in fact making matters worse by moving away from the desired competitiveness equilibrium (temporarily achieved towards the end of 2020) in

the process making it increasingly elusive. Little wonder then, that any gains made over the last six months are eroding quickly.

To conclude, given what we have learned and where we are, it is clear that the Pak government should be investing and focusing heavily in the nation's future and it is okay to for the time being to set input costs at levels that allow us to retain the competitive equilibrium necessary for growth (especially exports), even if we have to temporarily borrow to ensure this. With a new finance minister, young and fresh, one hopes that he will have a proactive and long-term approach in re-thinking our presently flawed economic equations.

Source: Published in The Nation

Some Important Economic Issues Entering 2022

By Dr Omer Javed

The current year saw the spread of Covid-19 vaccines, from their beginnings in the later part of 2020. Yet, while on one side the absence of removal of intellectual property rights (IPRs) meant that the world struggles more than it should have to, in order to reach one most potent vaccine against the Covid pandemic, on the other hand, vaccine inequality still remains a potent tool in the hand of the virus to keep transforming to more aggressive mutations, mainly at the back of seriously low vaccination in Africa, and in global south overall.

Project Syndicate (PS) editors in a recent article 'PS commentators' predictions for 2022' pointed out with regard to issues revolving around covid-19 vaccines as follows: 'With the covid-19 pandemic heading into its third year, last year's radically different "new normal" is no longer so new. The coronavirus continues to acquire mutations and threaten economic and social stability around the world.' Going into 2022, an important pledge the policymakers of both countries and in multilateral institutions should make is to come together as one global humanity facing a global threat. Vaccine apartheid needs to end, and with it, inordinate favours for domestic voter bases and corporate interests.

Renowned economists, Mariana Mazzucato and Jayati Ghosh, in their recent PS article indicated in this regard 'In addition to prolonging the covid-19 pandemic and threatening the economic recovery, the new omicron variant is a reminder that our system for managing global health emergencies remains woefully inadequate. Until we can ensure rapid production and equal availability of vaccines globally, the coronavirus will remain in charge.'

Another important issue, and even more consequential in terms of being both an important reason for covid-19, and also overall a significant determinant of existence of life as we know of it, climate change, which continues to remain a big challenge as 2021 saw, especially in the wake of lukewarm response of the COP26 conference in terms of commitments primarily in terms of finishing reliance on fossil fuel in a much faster manner. Co-author of the important and famous book *Why nations fail: the origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*, Daron Acemoglu highlighted this in the same PS article about predictions for

2022 as 'It is difficult to be optimistic about 2022. Despite all the corporate pledges and media attention focused on climate change, the COP 26 conference was a failure. In 2022, we will continue to realize that greenhouse-gas emissions are not declining, and that more radical responses are needed.'

In addition, highlighting the needed sense of urgency with regard to combating climate change that needs to be shown going into 2022, especially by the main polluters, Agnes Binagwaho pointed towards some of the significant impacts of climate change in the same PS article 'Global carbon dioxide emissions will continue to increase, with the largest contributions coming from high- and upper-middle-income countries (European, Chinese, and US per capita emissions are, respectively, six, seven, and 14 times higher than Africa's). Human activities will continue to fuel climate change, contributing to the fatal decline of important species such as bees, whose colonies are also being decimated by the inappropriate use of pesticides, habitat destruction, and air pollution. Given that heatwaves, droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events prevent people from engaging in agricultural work, and that bees and other pollinators affect 35 percent of the world's agricultural land and support the production of 87 of the leading food crops, we will see an increase of global insecurity, even in developed economies. Unable to sustain the production of the food they need, many of the world's poor will be pushed into extreme poverty, suffer malnutrition, and migrate.'

Institutions like IMF persisting with procyclical policies, should adopt a contrary stance going into 2022, while greater financial support needs to be provided by rich countries to developing countries, in the wake of the recession-causing pandemic, slow economic recovery in global south due to serious vaccine inequality, and a significant supply-side global commodity price shock

Call it a lack of ability, or the heightened sense of greed to serve selfish and immediate interests that is hindering policymakers to see the fast-approaching edge of cliff for world, and falling into a very difficult world of high global temperatures and its consequences on environment, economy, and everyday life as we know it, the fast is that the world is entering 2022 with a huge backlog of inaction, and of such important issues as climate change, and vaccine inequality.

And if this was not enough, the world may be getting closer to a debt pandemic and fast as 2022 unfolds, given continued significant influence of Neoliberalism/Washington Consensus on the policy frameworks of many

countries, including many rich, advanced countries having strong bearing on global financial system, and multilateral institutions, for instance, International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Such persistence, in turn, has meant that inclination towards procyclical policies in both advanced – since many western capitals already pushing towards tight monetary policies, with a similar stance also likely to be adopted on the fiscal side, sooner than later – and developing countries will lead to curtailing aggregate demand, when the contrary should be persisted with in the shape of looser macroeconomic policies, a balanced macroeconomic policy is pursued that allows giving proper attention to both macroeconomic management, and adequately attending to stimulus/development expenditure, and climate expenditure needs.

Jayati Ghosh in the same PS article regarding predictions for 2022, pointed out ‘For the developing world, the era of cheap money will end, even if central bankers in advanced economies hold back on plans to tighten their own monetary policies. Given the uncertain, uneven, and unequal recovery from the pandemic, this is bad news for most of the world. Prepare for massively increased financial instability, with more debt crises and banking crises generating economic turmoil in many parts of the world. In fact, 2022 may be the year when global “leaders” finally learn the hard way that protecting their elites’ own interests at the expense of everyone else can have damaging, even catastrophic, consequences.’

Therefore, instead of policies that lead to austerity, rich, advanced countries should continue with macroeconomic policies on a loose side at home while keeping in mind the mainly supply-side nature of inflation. At the same time, both rich, advanced countries, and multilateral institutions move towards undoing the neoliberal nature of policies, which for instance protect IPRs with regard to Covid vaccines, even during the pandemic, and on the other hand, understand the limitedness of the usage of macroeconomic policy tools with developing countries given the longevity of the pandemic, and slow economic recovery in the wake of vaccine inequality, producing greater demands on governments to provide for stimulus/development expenditures, especially for health sector, and also overall greater and more inclusive economic growth, given the highly likely rising levels of inequality and poverty.

Hence, institutions like IMF persisting with procyclical policies, should adopt a contrary stance going into 2022, while greater financial support needs to be provided by rich countries to developing countries, in the wake of the recession-causing pandemic, slow economic recovery in global south due to serious vaccine inequality, and a significant supply-side global commodity price shock.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Pakistan's New Strategic Pivot: Geo-Economics

By Dr Qaisar Rashid

On 14 December 2021, addressing the Margalla Dialogue Forum 2021 on “Foreign Policy Challenges of Future in changing Geo-political Landscape”, a debate organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said, “Indeed, we live in times of uncertainty. The world order seems to be in a state of severe stress and disarray. In these times, foreign policy and geo-politics is largely linked to geo-economics. I have consistently maintained, from here on, that the economy is in many ways our strategic compass with a dominant presence as a priority of foreign policy.”

The major drawback inherent in the statement is that it is Qureshi’s personal opinion, and not a declaration on behalf of Pakistan’s Foreign Office. Nevertheless, in the statement, Qureshi has admitted that Pakistan’s foreign policy has been in the throes of seeking relevance. Two points are implied. First, long ago, the world went economic but Pakistan failed to read the transferal. Second, anchored in geography, Pakistan’s priority for politics has not paid dividends. It is high time Pakistan forsook its denial mode and moved its focus to economy.

For the failure to shift the focus of the foreign policy to economy, Qureshi also mentioned the reason: the mindset. In this regard, Qureshi expressed his wish explicitly: “Pakistan as a geoeconomic centre with unparalleled regional connectivity has to come as a mindset, top down... We have had to reset the existing geopolitical mindset and embrace the importance of geo-economics.” That is, the mindset infatuated with ideological conflict and geopolitical strategies, which brought wars, drugs, terrorism and instability to Pakistan, has to be reformed. In this statement, the major admission is that the geopolitical mindset is still dominant, hindering the path to economic prosperity. Even today, Pakistan is beset with the ravages of archaic thought. The Pakistanis have to shift their mindset from geopolitics to geo-economics.

Qureshi is uttering the right sounds, against the background that the Cold War (1945-1991) remained anchored in ideology, dictating its terms to politics. After the end of the Cold War, the world made the economy its priority and the

economy started dictating its terms to politics. Compared to that, the Pakistanis remained obsessed with the idea that ideology was still relevant and that ideology could bring up another Cold War which could benefit them owing to Pakistan's geographical placement at the crossroads of South, Central and West Asia. The Pakistanis have spent three decades waiting for the delivery on the idea but in vain. The mindset created or shaped during the Cold War kept on asserting itself even after the end of the war. The hangover of the Cold War still lingers on in many brains in varied forms.

On the occasion, Qureshi also said, "For a shift from geopolitics to geo-economics, Pakistan wants a relationship with the USA in sync with our changed priority." This is where the ordeal lies. Qureshi did not generalize the shift in priority but localized it to the Pak-US bilateral confines. Nevertheless, the reason for the confinement or the selective application is fathomable. That is, Qureshi did not want to give an impression that generalization could also impinge upon Pakistan's relations with India. Such is a constraint Pakistan has been enmeshed in. Yet, Qureshi felt forced to say that Pakistan alone could not achieve the goal of geo-economic strength unless it was at peace with its archrival, India, as Qureshi said, "Pakistan's quest for peace and geo-economic strength cannot be a solo performance. It takes two to tango."

In short, Qureshi is right in saying that Pakistan has to make a strategic pivot from geo-politics to geo-economics. That is, seeking the benefit of its geography, Pakistan's orientation (or preference) has to be shifted from politics to economy. Focusing on Pak-US relations, Qureshi said, "Pakistan does not want a transactional relationship with the USA. We want multifaceted ties that are not susceptible to the vagaries of regional and international policies." Nevertheless, Qureshi was aware of the USA's reservations on Pakistan's growing trade relations with China. This was why he tried to strike a balance between the USA and China by saying, "Enhanced trade and investment ties with the USA and cooperation in regard to regional connectivity can work to our mutual benefit." The statement was in line with Qureshi's utterance on the occasion, "a country like Pakistan ...cannot make binary choices. We will remain equidistant, accessible to all, reaching out to all."

Two points are significant here. First, squeezed in between the national interests of the USA and China, Pakistan has been making efforts to seek economic benefits from both countries. Pakistan cannot make an either-or choice, as the

binary choice, but Pakistan is not alone in the equation. The USA is driven by its own priorities, and so is China. Much depends upon whether or not they offer Pakistan sufficient leeway diplomatically to circumvent the binary choice. Second, Pakistan is not in a position to present itself as equidistant to both the USA and China, even if Pakistan claims that it prefers geo-economics to geopolitics. The reason is that Pakistan has fostered different kinds of relations with both the countries. The past haunts the present and the present dictates the future.

In his address, Qureshi also laid an overly greater emphasis on digital technology by mentioning phrases such as digital diplomacy, digital economy, digital growth, digital alliance, digital sphere, digital space, and so on. Many people believe that digital technology is reshaping inter-state relations. Social media is considered a source of connection conveying one's message instantly, as the former US President Donald Trump used to do. Nevertheless, social media remains an informal medium that can be used to convey kneejerk reactions but not a thought-through answer. Using social media to convey critical messages, other than pleasantries, has an evanescent life. Diplomatic outreach does not rely on digital technology, especially when formal relations between two countries are concerned.

Qureshi not only linked the foreign policy with the economy but also with digital technology. That is, the better the economy; the better the future of the foreign policy. Similarly, the better the control over the digital sphere, the more the chances for amassing and monopolizing data, and the better the chances of influencing mindsets, controlling narratives and crafting perceptions.

In short, Qureshi is right in saying that Pakistan has to make a strategic pivot from geo-politics to geo-economics. That is, seeking the benefit of its geography, Pakistan's orientation (or preference) has to be shifted from politics to economy.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

2022: Unshackling Pakistan's Economy By

Dr Kamal Monnoo

s Pakistan enters its seventy-fifth year of independence, a conventional policy is unlikely to combat the breadth of its economic challenges. Across a range of areas—human capital, technology, agriculture, finance, trade, public service delivery and more—new ideas must (innovation) now be on the table. The Covid-19 pandemic has not only cost Pakistan many lives and livelihoods, it has also exposed major structural weaknesses in the economy.

A huge agriculture and employment crisis, rising and massive inequalities, tepid investment growth, chronic banking sector challenges and unprecedented Pak Rupee devaluations have plagued the economy, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It has also exposed the limitations of the Pakistani state, which tries to control too much—and ends up stifling the economy and the inherent energies of its young population; Bangladesh in this respect would be a good role model to follow where the state has tangibly demonstrated on how 'responsible' outsourcing to the private sector on key deliverables can not only take away from the burden of the state, but also impart them in a much more efficient and quality-oriented manner.

Oil edges higher as US crude inventories decline

Climate change is no longer a distant threat, while disruptive technology has huge implications for Pakistan's demographic dividend—already by now a significantly reduced annual snowfall level in the Himalayas is raising alarm bells. In addition, the dangerous lurch towards growing intolerance and public anger and frustration will cast its shadow on Pakistan's pursuit of prosperity for all.

While persistent inflation could be a contributing factor in the general national unease, the Sialkot incident involving the Sri Lankan operations manager tends to be a litmus test for the State to re-establish its firm writ over some right-wing elements spiralling out of control. So in essence, unshackling Pakistan would largely depend on the key question: Can Pakistan use the next twenty-five years, when it will reach the hundredth year of independence, to restructure not only its

economy but rejuvenate its democratic energy and unshackle its potential—to become a genuinely developed economy by 2047?

Punjab registers vehicles worth over Rs80 billion in 2021

For this to happen, the institutions that rule, the political apparatus, the establishment, the political diaspora, the bureaucracy and the judiciary, will need to jointly re-think the national vision, which fosters a prosperous and inclusive economy. They will jointly have to set their minds to new development priorities, acknowledge the hard truths, and lay out the clear choices and new ideas that Pakistan must adopt towards the goal of inclusive development and international acceptability.

So, what does Pakistan really deserve? With half the Quaid's vision already lost, will we keep on muddling through the current course or do we somewhere possess the inherent resolve to course correct and try and make Pakistan the state that its founding leader had envisioned? This is what will define the next 25 years and whether or not we can restore sanity to pick-up ourselves and bring in the right leaders or continue on the path of self-interest and placing concentrated wealth over larger national interest.

Ying Xiong's remarks at awarding ceremony for 'outstanding Pakistani staff of CPEC project'

Global economic development over the last 100 years teaches us an important lesson—through examples of the European Union, China, the Asian Tiger economies and the others—on how progress must be an amalgamation of economic growth and social prosperity, since neither can occur in isolation. We will have to address the question of how Pakistan can use the next twenty-five years, up to the centennial year of independence, to restructure not only its economy but rejuvenate its democratic energy and unshackle its potential to become a genuinely developed economy by 2047.

Unshackling Pakistan would require an unshakeable and sustainable focus on key ideas such as restricting the state's role to the universal provision of fundamental necessities, affirmative action to enjoy the advantages of a strong female workforce, as well as measures that ensure the demographic dividend is harvested.

To be able to clearly understand and comprehend and without resorting to typical economic jargon about why Pakistan's economy in the 60s', lauded as one of the most dynamic in the world, is now ailing, and what it will take to fix it, the answers lie in some sweeping agendas of reforms in order to reinvigorate growth and share the benefits more equitably, or in other words to make the country both more prosperous and happier.

Taliban uncharted economic policy may exacerbate ISIS threat

There is this rather urgent and pressing case for Pakistan's policymakers to fully and frontally confront long ignored realities about the Pakistani economy—its fragility, structural inequality and the low levels of state capacity which have been made especially visible in the ravages of COVID-19; the urgency to now finally place a much-needed spotlight on challenging the current economic status-quo and to offer important and even provocative policy prescriptions.

If Pakistan is to come out of its current and ongoing economic impasse, engaging with these provocations will be in finding the way back to sustainable growth and development. Meaning, unleashing wide-ranging second-generation reforms in the Pakistani economy with the sole purpose of reaching its full potential and delivering greater prosperity for its 230 million citizens by honestly grappling with the real concerns on gender, climate, health, education, state capacity and other challenges that remain unaddressed simply because the state never had the requisite resources and the capacity to look into them.

If Pakistan has to truly progress, then the urgency of the present moment, in the wake of Covid-19, has to be grasped in a revolutionary way against a backdrop of worsening global climate, and at a time when a manufacturing-led pathway to prosperity can no longer be taken for granted.

Unless we create a happier, more inclusive and prosperous society by the hundredth anniversary of independence and that too with a very specific roadmap to attain it, things will disintegrate very quickly leading to a situation that may render itself uncontrollable. The idea therefore should be to bring out the new possibilities of high-quality growth by successfully managing today's global concerns; climate change, greener operations, money laundering and responsible financing and to undertake bold structural reforms that aim to displace the present obsolete policy thinking and lay a strong emphasis on the

urgency of mobilising the latent economic growth potential of our women with the needed policy measures for their empowerment.

The kind of needed reforms being referred to are going to be both painful and painless. Pakistan should set aside its partisan divides and heed their wise advice. In essence, the key would be to look outwards and to start locking into the US\$80 trillion world market. If Indians can compete successfully in global markets, so can we Pakistanis and if we bravely jump into global markets, Pakistan's economy could explode. Seize the moment. Yes, we can!

Source: Published in The Nation

EDUCATION

Quality Higher Education By Atta-ur-Rahman

In 2002, when the Higher Education Commission (HEC) was established under my chairmanship, Pakistan was around 400 percent behind India in terms of research publications per capita, according to the Web of Science. Fortunately, educational reforms that we introduced, and that were continued for the next decade, resulted in astonishing progress that has been applauded by neutral international experts.

The landscape of higher education changed dramatically between 2002 and 2008 so much so that Pakistan not only caught up with India but also overtook it in the year 2018. This is no small achievement as India had been investing in higher education since its very birth – this includes the visionary policies of Nehru who established the IITs and other good quality higher education institutions in the 1950s and 60s.

The single most important element that determines the quality of higher education is the quality of faculty. For this reason, when the HEC was set up in 2002 under my chairmanship, the highest priority was given to the training and recruitment of high-quality faculty in our universities.

After a rigorous screening process, some 11,000 students were sent to the world's leading universities, and to attract them back on completion of their doctorate degrees, several important initiatives were introduced. First, a new contractual salary structure was introduced with the salaries of professors several times higher than that of federal ministers in the government. Second, students completing their PhD degrees could apply for research grants of up to \$100,000 – one year before completion of their work.

Third, graduates would have jobs on arrival with the HEC paying the salary. Fourth, an excellent digital library was set up that provided free access to 65,000

journals and 25,000 textbooks through the Pakistan Educational Research Network (PERN) that connected all universities with high-speed internet. Fifth, free access to sophisticated instruments was provided. Sixth, grants were made available through a liberal research grants scheme – National Research Projects for Universities (NRPU) – to help young academics to win sizeable research funding. These and other such measures led to a 97.5 percent return rate of scholars.

To control plagiarism, specialised software was introduced, which controlled this problem to a great extent. However, this issue persists – to a small extent – both in India and Pakistan and other countries. According to an article published in 2019 in 'Nature India', 980 papers published by top Indian institutions, including those from the IITs, between 2000 and 2017, were fraudulent or plagiarised and had to be retracted. Between 2005 and 2021, 254 publications were also retracted from Pakistan. This is an average of 15 papers per year (about 0.1 percent to 0.3 percent retractions annually).

To promote blended education, a mirror website of the MIT Open Courseware was set up in 2005 when I was the HEC chairman, and many undergraduate computer science courses were downloaded, copied on CDs, and distributed to all universities. An exciting scheme for live distance education was also introduced by us with top professors delivering daily lectures which were listened to live and interactively across Pakistan. A major programme was initiated to attract our highly qualified Pakistan diaspora back to the country.

Some 600 eminent academicians returned and played a valuable role in uplifting the quality of higher education in the country. Split PhD programmes were introduced so that PhD students in Pakistan could do a split PhD with a part of their time being spent in good foreign universities under the supervision of eminent foreign scholars. Pakistan was soon recognised internationally for these efforts, and glowing tributes were paid in numerous articles written by the world's leading educational authorities as well as by neutral experts of the British Council, World Bank, USAID, and UN. I was conferred the highest prize for institution-building by the World Academy of Sciences (Italy) and by the Austrian and Chinese governments.

Unfortunately, there was a sharp decline in the quality of higher education due to the actions of the former chairman HEC in the last three years which were

condemned by 178 out of the 180 vice chancellors of different public and private universities, who participated in a recent event organised in Bhurban.

Prime Minister Imran Khan is interested in the development of science and higher education in Pakistan. This is reflected in several actions of his government to support the efforts of the PM Task Force of Knowledge Economy: First, after years of stagnation, the present government has announced a sizeable increase in the operational budget of universities by a grant of an additional Rs15 billion on top of the Rs66 billion previously allocated – this is an increase of about 23 percent.

Second, after a decade of neglect, the salary structures of the tenure track faculty have been increased by 35 percent for all and by 100 percent for the best faculty members. Third, the Pakistan-Austrian University of Applied Science and Engineering has been established which is the only university in the country (and possibly in the Subcontinent) with 100 percent PhD-level faculty. This university has been developed in collaboration with three Austrian and five Chinese universities – its academic session has already started. Two other such universities are now being set up in Sialkot and Islamabad.

Fourth, a huge scholarship programme of Rs13 billion has again been launched. Fifth, the research grants NRPUI initiative that had been dropped by the previous chairman has been given a new life and some 1,200 research grants will be given to young faculty members across Pakistan this year. Sixth, centres of excellence in new and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, materials engineering etc are being set up across Pakistan, and 26 projects worth over Rs67 billion have already been approved.

Seventh, the development budget of the Ministry of Science and Technology has now been increased by about 600 percent by the Knowledge Economy Task Force projects after years of stagnation. Eighth, IT education is being prioritised. The visionary new policies proposed by the IT/Telecom task force of which I happen to be co-chairman have resulted in a 50 percent growth of IT exports from \$1.3 billion to \$2.1 billion during the last one year, and a huge revival of the IT industry is underway.

A silent revolution is now finally underway in Pakistan. The credit for this goes to Prime Minister Imran Khan and his whole-hearted support to three important task

forces – the Science and Technology Task Force, the IT/Telecom Task Force and the Knowledge Economy Task Force – that are being steered by us.

The writer is chairman PM

National Task Force on Science and Technology, former minister, and former founding chairman of the HEC.

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Prioritising Education in Pakistan By

Hisham Khan

It is true that Pakistan has come a long way since the days of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in terms of prioritizing primary education for the country's children. It is also a fact that Pakistan was unable to meet its MDG targets within the allocated period of 15 years, i.e., from 2000 – 2015.

For me, at least, the above statements are not contradictory. They are merely a reflection of the fact that while Pakistan's education indicators have certainly shown improvement over the last two decades, the pace of this progress has been slow.

This brings us to the present day and Agenda 2030 and its related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

After the passage of almost six years since Pakistan ratified the SDGs, swift progress does not seem to be on the cards.

Once again, we are explicitly lagging in terms of meeting the few targets that we had set under SDG 4, i.e., equitable education for ourselves. Once again, we are likely to repeat the same story and leave the SDGs unmet.

To begin with, 22.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 16 are out-of-school in Pakistan and around 53% of the out-of-school children are girls.

To be fair, this figure is based on the estimates presented in the Annual Education Statistics report 2016-17 since the most recent report conveniently discarded the chapter on out-of-school children without any reasonable explanation.

This alarming situation continues to persist despite the presence of Article 25-A, which pledges free and compulsory quality education to every Pakistani child between the ages of 5 to 16 years.

Contrary to and in complete disregard of this constitutional promise, most regions within Pakistan have been unable to notify and begin implementation against

Article 25-A despite the passage of 11 years since it was first made part of the Constitution.

Even in the provinces where it has been notified, quite clearly, 100 per cent access to education has not been achieved.

A recent white-paper “Public Investment in Education: Covid-19 and other emergencies in the Past” authored by Economist Asim Bashir Khan and published by Pakistan Youth Change Advocates (PYCA) clearly states that emergency or no emergency, cuts on education development expenditure are a routine practice and have little to do with the fall-out of emergency situations.

This clearly points at the fact that emergencies like earthquakes, floods and even Covid-19 cannot be blamed for Pakistan’s persistent lack of education funding. The real culprit would have to be an acute lack of political foresight and will.

Speaking about prioritizing girls’ education – since the majority of out-of-school children in Pakistan are girls – another white-paper “Public Investment in Education: An Appraisal of SDG 4 in Pakistan” also authored by Asim Bashir Khan and published PYCA and the Education Champion Network (ECN) highlights several glaring gaps that negate the high priority accorded to education on paper.

For instance, except for Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, which has – partially if not entirely – adopted the practice of gender-responsive education budgeting, no other province or region in Pakistan has budgets disaggregated by gender.

The state of education in Pakistan requires an urgent overhaul and a lot needs to be done swiftly and effectively for things to take a turn for the better.

Putting into action an effective strategy to curtail drop-outs, making Pakistan’s education system shock resilient, incentivising education for the most marginalized children, especially girls, broadening of the tax net at the federal and provincial levels, adopting gender-responsive budgeting and conducting robust awareness drives to promote the value of girls’ education (including married girls of school-going age, young mothers, and girls living with disabilities) would be a few things to set Pakistan on the right track.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

Sustainable Educational Institutes By

Muhammad Ali Falak

The world has changed; so, does the definition of success for the students in this post-crisis world. Institutions need to create spaces for students to achieve their meaning of achievements. While an institution's success is gauged by the number of graduates it produces every year; students' success depends upon whether they have the right training to perform in the professional world. For a long time now in Pakistan, institutes are blamed for only serving their interests without equipping their students with the right skillset giving them financial independence, etiquette and learning behaviour.

This generated a vacuum – filled by Motivational speakers, Influencers, TikTokers, E-commerce gurus who are seen on social media relegating the importance of degree programmes in the universities, calling formal education a farce, advising students to spend time and money instead in learning skills for swift financial gains. Jobless degree holders work as a catalyst to support this stance.

Instant gratification, glamour and returns are what enable the message of these content creators seep seamlessly into the impressionable mind of the youth who are promised endless opportunities without even given a hint of what they are missing – precious time of their youth to develop their personalities, vision, social intelligence and analytical abilities inside the classrooms.

In the post-pandemic world, change is silently sweeping the education sector of Pakistan where students like in developed countries will be responsible for paying for their university education instead of their parents like in the past. Universities must realise that in the changing socio-economic scenarios, success for students now may be more than knowledge and degrees. They want to be socially responsible, financially independent and be able to contribute to solving complex problems in society – all that is claimed to be achieved once they become a TikTok star.

Think of a student in the US who works as a carpenter during the day to support his degree and is only able to take time out during the weekends and evenings

with his staggering schedule for work. He manages to continue his education only because the institutes offer him face to face, distant, remote, online and offline learning facilities. He can pick the time, space, even mode of examination as per his convenience. What a similar guy will do in Pakistan? Start a YouTube channel? Become a TikToker? All without any training?

In Pakistan, unfortunately, educational institutions are only as flexible as a fat man in a yoga class! Courses offered by these institutes have outdated curriculums, lack hands-on training, and are rigid in terms of time and space. They adapt to new trends at a snail's speed. E-commerce, online content creation, cryptocurrency, blockchain and cybersecurity are emerging fields but are hardly offered by leading universities in the countries.

With no formal training, skills and educational background, the youth in Pakistan can hardly meet the international standards of these latest skills needed in the world. Also, on a platform like Upwork, Fiver and Amazon most do not perform well because of their superficial knowledge and aversion to research and development. The youth needs grooming. Period. Universities must provide it even if for being a TikToker.

It is high time for institutes in Pakistan to shun 'one size fits all' practice and emphasise acknowledging the individuality of the students. Focusing on the academic involvement of the students includes where the students are coming from and the career path they choose for themselves. Flexibility is pertinent.

There must be more alternative pathways and credit to job and degree for students for their future, including prior learning assessments, micro-credentialing, competency-based education and badging. With a changing labour market, students must experience a relevant and inclusive curriculum, gain skills of the future and now, and be provided experiential learning opportunities. The equity-minded lens approach is essential. Students are participating in learning activities from various locations: libraries, classrooms, dorm rooms, parent's houses, crowded apartments, cafes or workplaces.

The pandemic highlighted the basic needs gaps for students and the importance of social connection. Institutions need to ensure security including housing, food, jobs, transportation and technology through appropriate funding and support, including emergency loans, affordable tuition, free texts and course materials.

There is a dire need to move forward towards sustainable educational institutions and a robust learning system that focuses on skill-based learning, enabling students to be financially independent and socially responsible to be able to contribute to their families, society, country and the world. It's time for a class!

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Education: Not Enough Mistakes to Learn

From By Arooj Naveed Haq

How does learning happen? From Math, to leadership, we know that learners need to move beyond simply being told how something works and must practically try their hand at it in order to build neural connections that last, and to more generally speaking, achieve mastery at what they are doing. While we do live in a scholastic culture that admits the importance of practical application, implementation of hands-on opportunities is lacking in our average classroom. This is only one gap of very many, and a root cause behind much of this is a behavioral one — learned and institutionalised through draconian policies that further aggravate the very learning crises they seek to solve: an unwillingness to allow people to make mistakes, and learn from them.

If you attempt to do something different in the average government school classroom — say modify a textbook at teacher's discretion, spend time doing unusual activities such as playing a game through which students learn to divide, or allocate time differently to allow students to really master a skill rather than simply regurgitate a few lines — you are likely to be met with panic and staunch opposition from school administration and staff. While most Pakistanis are biased towards blaming teachers for failing to 'instill creativity' or encourage 'practical application' of concepts, the truth is that the institutional environment that the average government school teacher operates in is actually responsible for disincentivising any and all experimentation with learning.

Teachers at government schools risk far too much to try anything different in the classroom. In my experience, this anxiety extends to newcomers within the system that veterans are apprehensive of, and why should they not be? Daily wagers seeking to gain a permanent position are afraid of not being brought into the fold of 'government job security' if something goes wrong with their end-of-year results, others are worried about the backlash they may face if an inquiry is called to question their performance.

Of course, the intention behind the policies that have our teachers scared today was to create a sense of accountability for a system that lacked it for a long time. In a country where ghost schools have been an everyday story, and some

teachers instead of doing their jobs at school were found pursuing alternative career paths in the outside world, there was a need to create structures that ensured those tasked with teaching our children had to answer to someone. However, the very performance metrics upon which schools are currently judged do more harm than good; teachers are afraid to deviate from old-school practices that get kids through to the next grade (teaching to the test, reliance on rote-memorisation etc) and in fact resort to practices that are downright unconstitutional in far too many cases. From convincing students' parents that they cannot give a board exam (that they cannot even try) while registered under the school's name, to pre-emptively failing students who risk board exam failure, a lot of teachers in the government school system strategise ways to ensure 100 per cent pass rates — and often succeed — thus showing perfect results that are otherwise impossible to achieve in an educational system that is broken for more than one reason.

The demonising attitude and repercussions with which many government school teachers are now treated often translate to their treatment of students too. Instead of creating classrooms that allow for mistakes and subsequent growth, we find adults telling primary school children outright that they are *nalaiq* (stupid, incompetent), that they are going to fail anyway. This is an oppressive system that leaves no room for learning from error; where from top to bottom, past to future, we see policymakers demonising school staff and teachers, and the latter demonising students that step out of line. How will we create a better world where learners can flourish and be creative when we can't even create that sort of environment for the adults that teach them?

A lot needs fixing in our education system, and world. We don't stand a chance if we don't give ourselves, and those around us, the leeway to learn from our mistakes, and rebuild from where we are most broken. For policymakers and teachers alike, we need to create more room for error — and hence, learning — in the environments we are tasked with managing.

Source: Published in Express Tribune

Post-withdrawal US-Taliban Talks By Dr Qaisar Rashid

On 23 November 2021, the State Department of the United States (US) announced through its spokesperson Ned Price that under the stewardship of Tom West, the new US Special Representative for Afghanistan, the US would send its delegation to Doha (Qatar) to spend two days on talks with the Taliban next week.

The last formal US-Taliban talks were held in Doha on 29 February 2021. Now after a hiatus of nine months, the US is ready to resume talks with the Taliban. As announced, top agenda items would be three: first, to ensure the safe passage of US citizens and certain Afghans from Afghanistan; second, to agree on ways to handle the impending humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan; and third, to seek reassurances from the Taliban not to outsource the country to the terrorists for turning Afghanistan into a launching pad for terrorism.

On the part of the US, the new strategy to deal with Afghanistan is interesting: avoid claiming a victory publicly, hand over power to the main adversary, and make the adversary do the lender's bidding. Apparently, on 29 February 2021, the US made the Taliban its proxy, who would watch the US interests of counter-terrorism in Afghanistan. That is, the Taliban would rout out the al-Qaeda leftovers and subdue the Islamic State (ISIS) called the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K). By the way, the spawning of the al-Qaeda before 2001 and that of the ISIS-K after 2001 in Afghanistan means that the land of Afghanistan abides schism, whether in the name of ethnicity or religion. The Afghan land thrives on fractions proclaiming sovereign and sequestered enclaves. Decentralized and dissociative trends have become a norm in Afghanistan, no matter how much the drifts are incongruous with the age. In a way, on 29 February 2021, the US tasked the Taliban with centralizing their authority and running against the factious tendencies innate in Afghanistan. The Taliban have yet to deliver on the assigned onerous task.

The fear swaying Afghanistan is that the Taliban government in Kabul may founder on the challenge of economic inadequacy

Currently, the fear swaying Afghanistan is that the Taliban government in Kabul may founder on the challenge of economic inadequacy. Two decades of occupation (from 2001 to 2021) have taught the US two lessons. First, Afghanistan is rife with rampant corruption, which is inescapable for government employees. In the two decades, the US drowned around \$ 1 trillion of its economy in Afghanistan. Of the spent amount, the US spent \$ 146 billion to reconstruct and rehabilitate Afghanistan. Further, the US disbursed \$89 billion to train and equip Afghanistan's National Security Forces, which melted away with munitions on 15 August 2021 in the face of the Taliban's onslaught on Kabul.

Second, negotiating with the Taliban is a gruelling task. The US has learned it the hard way since 18 June 2013 when Qatar permitted the Taliban to open their office to let US-Taliban negotiations take place in Doha. The US now knows that the Taliban believe in holding rounds and rounds of protracted mutual consultations before they agree on a point. A pall of scepticism keeps hanging over the conclusion of the US-Taliban negotiations until the Taliban's spokesperson surfaces at a press conference, later on, to proclaim the Taliban's consent to the offered proposals. Further, the Taliban can easily end negotiations in nought. The US expects that this time the talks would also be time-consuming. Better spare two days.

The Taliban are excited at the prospects of the forthcoming talks. They consider themselves consummate negotiators, who adroitly defied their subaltern combatant position, thrashed out a winning deal, and snatched victory from the jaws of the US-NATO dominance. This time, the Taliban would be haughty. They might reckon the talks a new beginning, but the US might consider the talks an equivalent to just picking up the threads.

The priority of the Taliban is to get their government recognized internationally, and this is not possible without the US' consent for it. The Taliban face diplomatic isolation, which no country of the region dares to breach. For regional neighbours, Afghanistan is still backwatering unless flagged by the US to embrace. The ascendance of the Taliban government was not a product of the efforts of regional countries but it was because of the willingness of the US and its allies to vacate Afghanistan.

The second priority of the Taliban is to get financial assets and assistance restored. The Taliban have been already asking the US to release their frozen \$9.5 billion. For the time being, the Taliban have been demanding Afghan money, but their need is more than that. The Taliban have also come to grips with the reality that without financial help they cannot sustain control. A civil war might set in. The world has gone economic. If the Taliban become able to persuade the US to open the financial route of aid, other developed countries might think of rescuing the Taliban government financially. The dependence of the Taliban on external financial help is bound to be consequential. Nevertheless, it may not be the priority of the US to make the Taliban self-sufficient financially, but finance would offer the US requisite leverage over Afghanistan to achieve the much-touted objectives. The US may think of doling out Afghanistan the money just adequate to endure the throes of the cold weather, unless the Taliban start delivering on the Doha agreement of February 2021.

Afghanistan's economy cannot survive by itself. It is now a foreign assistance based economy. Equally, it would be difficult for the US to see its investment to rebuild Afghanistan reels under the weight of Kabul's bankruptcy. The US wants dialogue to continue but the US may like to offer assistance in the humanitarian domain only. Apparently, the US intends to squeeze the Taliban both diplomatically and financially to make them deliver on their promises: fighting terrorism, installing an inclusive government, respecting the rights of women folk and minorities, and providing equal access to all to education and employment. The Taliban are still dilly-dallying on this account.

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Who's to Blame for Asia's Arms Race? By Thomas Shugart; Van Jackson

BEIJING'S BELLIGERENCE HAS SET THE STAGE FOR CONFLICT

Thomas Shugart

China's military buildup is undeniable. It has built hundreds of long-range and precise ballistic missiles, launching them for years at mockups of U.S. ships and bases in Asia. It has constructed the world's largest navy in terms of the number of ships, vastly exceeding the U.S. Navy's rate of warship production in recent years. As Beijing has grown stronger, it has also become increasingly belligerent: it bullies neighbors that have had the temerity to use their own natural resources, and its state-controlled media routinely threaten Taiwan with invasion.

But in "America Is Turning Asia Into a Powder Keg" (October 22), Van Jackson argues that an "overly militarized" U.S. approach is to blame for increasing the risk of war and worsening negative regional trends. Although Jackson concedes that Washington is not "the cause of these troubling trends," and "should not be blamed for the actions of China and North Korea," his article leaves the opposite impression. Furthermore, he makes his case by presenting facts that are at times misleading, mischaracterized, or inaccurate. He portrays as recklessness what is in fact a rational U.S. and allied response to a dramatic expansion of China's offensive military capabilities.

Jackson starts by blaming Washington for "surging troops and military hardware into the region." Although there have been a number of initiatives to "pivot to the Pacific" and rebalance the U.S. military toward Asia, the change in American troop presence has not been as dramatic as this rhetoric suggests. According to the Pentagon's personnel records, roughly 89,000 U.S. active-duty troops were stationed in the Indo-Pacific theater as of this summer. A decade ago, the number was about 84,000. An increase of 5,000 troops, constituting less than half a percent of the U.S. armed forces' personnel, does not constitute a "surge" that is aggravating tensions in the region, even if one takes into account the few thousand additional soldiers that are likely present at any time on rotational missions.

Jackson also blames the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden for embarking on defense initiatives that he claims escalate an arms race with China. He cites its encouragement of Japan to develop hypersonic weapons (a program that was unveiled in March 2020, ten months before Biden's inauguration) and extend the range of its antiship missiles (also begun in 2020). He further states that the administration has announced plans for an expanded presence in Guam—reference to the ongoing move of 5,000 U.S. Marines to Guam from Okinawa, Japan (farther away from China), which has been planned since 2006. Finally, he mentions a new base in Papua New Guinea—actually an upgrade of an existing base, which was announced in 2018—and new radars in Palau, which lie more than 1,500 miles from China and whose arrival was first announced in 2017. These policies to counter China's growing military threat should not be attributed solely to Biden's team; instead, they represent a cross-administration and bipartisan effort to cope with the clear reality of a rapidly deteriorating military balance.

In the realm of nuclear forces, Jackson also mischaracterizes the timeline of events and gets some of the details wrong. He states, for example, that the “the Trump administration drew up plans for a three-decade nuclear modernization effort that would cost between \$1.2 and \$1.7 trillion” and points to China's expansion of its nuclear arsenal as one reason for this initiative. In fact, President Donald Trump inherited those plans from his predecessor, Barack Obama. And although China's activities constitute one factor in Washington's need to maintain a nuclear deterrent force, far and away the greatest reason for the modernization program is the aging of decades-old U.S. nuclear platforms, which are vital to U.S. national security for a host of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with China.

As Beijing has grown stronger, it has also become increasingly belligerent. Jackson also mischaracterizes U.S. nuclear modernization plans as an “expansion.” In reality, the plans will reduce the number of nuclear-only strategic launchers—that is, intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles—that Washington maintains. The U.S. Air Force will reuse launch facilities, and the ballistic missile submarine force will drop from 14 to 12 submarines and from 20 to 16 missile tubes on each one. The air force's planned purchase of B-21 bombers will increase the number of aircraft, but the new bombers are intended for both nuclear and conventional roles. And although Jackson describes the B-21 as replacing the current B-2 bomber force with “more than six times as many

planes,” the B-21s will in fact replace both the B-2 and the larger B-1 fleet—and possibly even the venerable force of 1960s-built B-52s.

Finally, Jackson asserts that China’s recent and breathtaking nuclear expansion is “clearly a response to the gratuitous, unrestrained nuclear policies of the Trump administration.” This is far from clear, however. Several other factors may account for China’s moves: Beijing may want to be able to overwhelm U.S. missile defenses, may be trying to escape U.S. nuclear coercion, or may be seeking to maintain leverage in the event of a conventional conflict. And China’s leaders stated in 2017—well before the release of the Trump administration’s 2018 Nuclear Posture Review and National Defense Strategy—their desire to have a “world-class military by the middle of the century.” Developing world-class nuclear forces may be part of that larger effort, which would take place regardless of the actions of the Trump or Biden administration.

Jackson is correct that the United States should be working harder to find ways to cooperate and compete with China in nonmilitary arenas. But he presents Washington as busied “with new arms sales and expanding its force posture” as China has become an economic giant—as if China weren’t also selling arms and dramatically altering the military balance in the region while it did so. China, like the United States, has the ability to walk and chew gum at the same time.

Washington is finally coming to recognize the looming danger that an aggressive and increasingly powerful techno-authoritarian Chinese regime poses to the region and the world and is taking action accordingly. Failing to recognize this danger and to pursue appropriate responses would increase the chance of conflict by making it more likely that the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party will someday decide that the military balance of power has tipped in their favor—and that they should take advantage of the shift by resorting to force.

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AMERICAN MILITARISM IS ENDANGERING THE REGION

Van Jackson

Thomas Shugart dismisses the idea that Washington's adversaries might react to its overmilitarized foreign policy in undesirable ways. His critique compiles minor complaints that misrepresent what I wrote and also fail to refute my argument. The larger point that Shugart misses is that U.S. policy in Asia remains on the wrong side of trends that adversely impact both regional security and U.S. interests. He appears to be primarily concerned with ensuring that Washington receives no "blame" for Asia being awash in militarism, and he shows little interest in having the United States improve an increasingly precarious situation in Asia.

Shugart mostly quibbles with my choice of words rather than challenge the claims I advance. For instance, I describe the broad trend of Washington "surging troops and military hardware into the region" and then detail precisely what I mean over the course of several paragraphs. Shugart ignores my description in favor of telling the reader how many troops the United States positions in Asia. This does not refute my argument, as the surge of militarism I describe has taken place over the course of several years and is as much about hardware and bases as it is about personnel. Disputing the rate of change and whether rotational forces or weapons systems count as "surging" litigates a gerund rather than addressing the actual posture and force structure changes I describe in my essay. Moreover, Shugart's figure of 89,000 U.S. troops stationed in the Indo-Pacific—which is a lot in its own right—excludes forces that surge into the region for the many large-scale exercises the United States conducts each year.

Shugart also incorrectly states that I blame President Joe Biden's administration for Japan's pursuit of hypersonic missiles. I do not, and my essay makes clear that Biden is the steward of a bad trend that predates him. I do not state that the administration initiated the development, as Shugart suggests.

In response to my cataloging of Washington's many new military initiatives over the past several years, Shugart rationalizes these programs by writing that they aim to "counter China's growing military threat." Of course they do. He states this as a rebuttal, yet I say explicitly that the United States justifies its litany of changes to the U.S. force posture in response to China's military modernization. My problem with it is that it reflects poor judgment.

As Asia's military hegemon, the United States has a hand in shaping the trends that endanger the region.

On the issue of U.S. nuclear forces, Shugart argues that former President Donald Trump's gratuitous nuclear plans were actually former President Barack Obama's policies. This is not entirely correct and is in any case irrelevant. During the Obama administration, the Pentagon did draw up nuclear modernization plans that Trump inherited. (I worked there at the time.) But Trump's nuclear-related budget submissions expanded the Obama-era nuclear agenda. Even so, Biden's nuclear policies are no more vindicated by assertions that they date to the Obama era than that they date to the Trump era. I care about the consequences of U.S. actions, not their genealogy.

Here again, Shugart shadowboxes with my diction rather than my analysis. I characterized U.S. nuclear modernization many times in my essay and toggled between describing it as "modernization" and "expansion" for the sake of variety, but both terms are accurate. Shugart seizes on the word "expansion" to point out that the number of long-range nuclear-capable missile launchers that the United States possesses is not increasing. But I never said it was. What's expanding is the lethality and cost (and opportunity costs) of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

But even if all of these misleading complaints were valid, they do not amount to a defense of current U.S. policies or their military-first character. As Asia's military hegemon, the United States has a hand in shaping the trends that endanger the region. For politicians, American exceptionalism means never having to acknowledge Washington's complicity in bad outcomes. Analysts, however, can't afford to be so myopic.

Shugart aligns himself with what I see as America's militarist drift without specifying how U.S. efforts to "counter" China's military modernization with more missiles, ships, and nuclear weapons help anything. And he neglects to address the concern that takes up the final third of my essay: the idea that an obsession with military strategy distracts from what actually threatens Asia. Gross economic inequalities, environmental degradation, and the devastation wrought by the pandemic are what Asians most worry about and what threaten to sow the seeds of future military conflict. Shugart's failure to acknowledge, much less address, these problems reflects the very obsession with military affairs that my essay sought to highlight. In this sense, he inadvertently makes my point. The

Pentagon has warped analysts' ability to contemplate statecraft beyond defense policy.

The totality of Shugart's criticisms fails to refute my case that the U.S. approach to Asia is overmilitarized. Shugart declines to propose any particular way of seeing or understanding China. And if his assumptions about the intrinsic goodness of American power become a basis for U.S. policy, the region will face a grim future.

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Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

Superpower and its Credibility By Dr Farah

Naz

A superpower should be a role model for all sovereign states. The US, enjoying being one of the superpowers by holding the largest economy, military might, freedom & free enterprises, excellent democracy that makes her champion of the world. Today, more than 200 countries and entities look up to it in times of crisis, help and support.

All these developing countries look up to the US for kindness, political and economic support, benevolence and all. No doubt, there is a huge responsibility on the shoulders of the superpower as the powerhouse of global politics.

It has to work in such a fashion that it remains neutral, unbiased and should not be in the business of cherry-picking exercises.

The US attitude towards world issues should be free of unfairness, partiality and prejudice. Well, these are the public expectations from the job description of the superpower in world politics.

But, when it comes to power dynamics and working unbiased, does the US satisfy all of its above stated credentials or not? Does it fulfil its job requirements free of prejudice or not?

It is generally observed that the US is not treating all states fairly and on equal footings.

The recent blacklisting events have exposed the credibility of the superpower that plays double standards in global politics.

The Biden Administration added a dozen Chinese companies to its trade blacklist on 24 November 2021.

According to western media, of those blacklisted, eight Chinese technology entities were added for their alleged role in assisting the Chinese military's quantum computing efforts. US officials have long complained that Chinese

companies are beholden to the People's Republic of China and collect sensitive information on behalf of the People's Liberation Army.

The blacklisting does not stop with the Chinese companies alone, it moves beyond. The Commerce Department also listed 16 entities and individuals operating in China and Pakistan for their work on Islamabad's nuclear and ballistic missile program.

In all, the Biden Administration added 27 entities and individuals located in the People's Republic of China, Pakistan, Russia, Japan and Singapore.

According to the US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo in a statement shared that "global trade and commerce should support peace, prosperity and good-paying jobs, not national security risks. The Department of Commerce is committed to effectively using export controls to protect our national security."

The US Commerce Department claims that they want to stop the Chinese military from developing its counter-stealth technology, which could include equipment like advanced radars and counter-submarine applications such as undersea sensors.

These actions also block US material from being used to help China break encryption or develop unbreakable encryption.

They set a condition that suppliers to companies on the entity list should apply for the licence before they can sell to them, which are likely to be denied in the first place.

Indeed, national security is supreme and, above all, not only for the world's superpower but all states including China that happens to be the second-largest economy and an emerging power.

They also have all the rights under the law to protect and defend themselves against their potential rivals/competitors.

But such recent measures test the credibility of the US as a superpower with all military and economic might which is keen to improve its image in the world.

The international law as exercised by the superpower selectively uses the “pick and choose” as a formula that goes beyond its job/role description in global politics.

The Chinese government reaction to such measures seriously tests the credibility of the superpower where such measures are coming up in times of serious tension between the two superpower blocs, the US and China, over Taiwan conflict and trade issues.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington charged that the US uses the catch-all concept of national security and abuses state power to suppress and restrict Chinese enterprises in all possible means.

The Chinese Embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu reiterated that China is firmly opposed to that.

He further said the US should “follow the spirit” of a virtual meeting between Joe Biden and Xi Jinping and “meet China halfway instead of going further down the wrong path.”

According to Shu Jueting, a spokesperson for the Chinese Commerce Ministry said on Thursday 25 November 2021 that China strongly opposes the sanctions on the Chinese companies, and will lodge solemn representations with the US.

Zhao Lijian, the spokesman at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, warned that China will take all the necessary steps to defend its companies, and reserves the right to take countermeasures against the sanctions.

Pakistan also condemned the attempts made by the US where Pakistan’s nuclear weapon is in a foolproof security environment duly acknowledged by the superpowers, IAEA and several US officials such as Admiral Micheal Mullen, John D Negroponte, General Petraeus, Robert Gates, P J Crowley, Micheal Flournoy, James Clapper, etc.

They need to monitor and keep a close watch on the black marketing of Indian nuclear material for being repeatedly sold in the market for a few pennies as per media reports such as: on 30 August 2021, two persons were arrested for illegal possession of extremely rare Sealed Radioactive Source Californium which is

highly radioactive and toxic substance; on 4 June 2021, 6.4 kg of uranium was seized in India and police arrested seven persons; on 11 May 2021, the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad arrested two persons with 7 kg of natural uranium.

The so-called champion of non-proliferation, the US has remained silent as if on holidays on the nuclear material black-marketing.

Had this been found in the case of Pakistan, the US might have suspended its holidays and would have come/treated Pakistan with the sanction and strict measures.

Isn't it a dual standard in international political politics? Is it consistent with the job description of the superpowers as mentioned above? It is in this background, that the people are questioning on what grounds the US can blacklist Chinese firms for allegedly aiding Pakistan's nuclear activities where the US itself is not taking any action against nuclear material black marketing in India, its strongest ally and being a partner in the US-India nuclear deal. Other concerned countries will surely express serious reservations on such extreme measures.

Because, it's not only favouritism in tech and trade policies that all states are upset with the US but global politics, war strategies and human rights issues that question the superpower credibility in the world, today.

To be a role model and powerhouse representing all states fair treatment is required, not cherry-picking!

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Source: Published in Pak Observer

China and Global Challenges By Mustafa Talpur

China has taken some surprising yet bold steps to combat the three major global challenges: the relentless fight against economic inequality, addressing catastrophic climate change effects, and vaccinating a billion people in a year. On top of this list is the country's remarkable success in ending extreme poverty in just two decades.

The entire world is facing these three major challenges, but Chinese leaders paid attention to the latest trends and either took concrete action or are devising plans to deal with the challenges in a swift manner.

The last three decades have seen an unprecedented level of income and wealth inequality. Despite the global Covid-19 pandemic, the wealth of the world's billionaires increased significantly, and they bounced back – after facing the slump in business operations caused by worldwide lockdowns – within a few months. On the other hand, the world's poor may need a decade to reach pre-pandemic levels. These disparities are an outcome of the neo-liberal economic policies that were promoted in the 1980s.

A flawed market-driven economic model where a government – whether elected or unelected – just plays a subservient role to the global capital has caused extreme levels of inequalities.

China has been a beneficiary of market-led economic growth. But the benefits of this growth were not equally distributed. By 2018, China had 373 billionaires – 331 new billionaires were added between 2008 and 2018, with the top one percent increasing its share in national wealth from 21.1 percent in 2000 to 32.6 percent in 2018. It is well known that China used to be an egalitarian country, but following the 1978 economic reforms, the country's income gap widened sharply.

This massive inequality and the rising divide are still a major challenge for the Chinese government which has initiated several programmes to tame it. The first step is to reduce the urban-rural income gap through migration, urbanisation, subsidies to farmers and social protection programmes. Second, China's

targeted poverty reduction actions include increasing wage income, government transfers and regional development programmes – all of which helped in reducing poverty.

Third, the country took several steps to narrow down the gender gap. The urban economy and government policies contributed to narrowing the gap. Education also played a significant role in dealing with the problem. Through the country's efforts, the gap in the education level between women and men decreased and the proportion of women with college degrees and higher education caught up to that of men.

Despite these progressive policies, realising the higher level of the rich-poor divide, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced, in August this year, to “adjust excessive incomes”, giving a clear message to the super rich that the state plans to redistribute wealth to tackle widening inequality. During a meeting of the Chinese Communist party's Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission, the president said that the government should “regulate excessively high incomes and encourage high-income groups and enterprises to return more to society”. This declaration could be an example for the world and other countries in the Asia Pacific, which are drafting inequality reduction policies.

Climate change is another major and existential threat. China is on the forefront to combat climate change – both at home and abroad – and is investing in renewable energy, climate adaptation, and resilience building. It also tried to fill the vacuum created by the US under former president Donald Trump. However, the major challenge remained with China's coal-based power plants abroad. During his speech at the recently held UNGA – in September – Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China will stop financing coal power plants. This announcement, though be taken cautiously, will be a game changer in the future energy development in Asia.

Asian economies were on the path of rapid growth before the pandemic hit in 2020. There is a danger that countries will rely on fossil fuel-based energy sources for their economic recovery. Therefore, it is critical that countries implement this Chinese decision of doing away with coal-based power plants and have a robust monitoring mechanism. This will lay the foundation of more sustainable and greener recovery. Other rich countries must also follow this decision to combat global climate change effects.

Covid-19, which was first detected in China in late 2019, has been affecting the entire world for the last two years now, causing a high number of deaths and economic shocks. Millions of workers were sent home; a majority of them were women and low-paid or underpaid care workers. The situation required swift action from governments and communities to get back to normalcy. Despite its huge population, China was able to contain the virus to a large extent.

Like some Western companies which were able to introduce Covid-19 vaccines in the market, Chinese companies also produced their vaccines in a timely manner. They not only succeeded in vaccinating over a billion people in a year, but also donated vaccines to other countries including Pakistan. Because of the Chinese vaccines, today, over 50 million Pakistanis are fully vaccinated and over 80 million partially vaccinated. It also helped mitigate the spread of the virus in Pakistan.

China follows a different political system, which does not allow the same level of individual freedom that exists in Western societies. The state has much more control over people's right to assembly and association, and freedom of information. However, progressive policies and their long-term impact on China and the world are long lasting. Pakistan and countries in the region have lot to learn from the country's economic policies and see what is better for the people.

The writer is an Islamabad-based environmental and human rights activist.

Source: Published in The The News

The Unending Variants — Coronavirus By

Inam Ul Haque

wrote 'The great equaliser' outlining the implications and response to the Covid-19...the 'Pandemic' on 29 April 2021. Coronavirus ever since has remained a 'Suez moment' in human history; that is affecting being human in not yet fully comprehensible ways. From work to leisure to travel to living normal lives to commerce to geopolitics to vaccine economy to disturbed trade and supply chains to oil price volatility...nothing seems to have remained untouched by the visible implications of the invisible.

The lessons learnt so far include; responding to the pandemic together as humanity, since the pathogen respects no international borders. That SOPs and restrictions are creating unattended economic, social, political and psychological downsides. That this Pandemic has — yet again — exposed the inadequacy of human knowledge. That the virus challenges ideologies, bloc-politics, leadership and social systems. That healthcare and medical sector is seemingly the only winner. That vaccine politics has changed the Europe's core and relations among big powers...the US, China, Russia and the EU. And that China seems to be winning the contest of global leadership with the 'Quad' (Australia, India, Japan and US) grouping unable to contain the 'Rising Dragon'.

Nature works in strange ways. Ill-will begets ill-will. With China demonised as the virus's birthplace; the US, finding an opportunity, went after communist China to arrest its indomitable rise. Instead, Europe and the US, in particular the US, went in a tailspin due to incompetent handling of the Pandemic because of inept leadership. The situation went from bad to worse given a confused and fearful scientific and medical community...more intent on saving their lucrative jobs rather than speaking the truth. And now, we are on the verge of a 'South African Wave'. Meanwhile the entire humanity is to be vaccinated with most getting a booster shot 'forever' in the new normal. And the efficacy of this response against Omicron, the new variant, is 'reportedly' questionable.

Fear again grips a fearful humanity. There would be renewed debates, studies and conclusions coming from the bitterly divided experts...who guided us from herd immunity to universal vaccination, in not too distant past. Profiteers would

fish with more enthusiasm in the troubled waters and governments would be lost again to find an 'optimum' response. A response that protects their citizenry and economy at the same time.

With democracies withering, personal freedoms surrendered — voluntarily and involuntarily — and the West's imperialism morphing into 'Vaccine Colonialism', new regional orders are shaping up. In response to the Pandemic, 'regionalised healthcare systems' have been administratively efficient. Without claim to any scientific, medical and virological expertise, one has always maintained that 'fighting and eliminating the virus' has historically remained a tough ask. Virus debut is part of our shared life story. Virus mutation along with human mutation is God's ways of letting humans survive and heed His wake-up calls.

In the interim period, countries need to deploy flexible, expandable software and hardware to deal with surges. And to do so, humanity has to cooperate globally and regionally and not compete. Hoarding medical supplies for national usage and export controls on raw materials reflect callous selfishness. The virus resurgence is teaching us this single lesson over and over, if we care to note. Combined with a near climate disaster, the whole human ship needs to be protected not the 'first class'...to paraphrase the Spanish foreign minister, Arancha González. Most associated expense can be defrayed through corona-related taxation.

Besides the above zahiri asbab (visible responses), a lot lies in the realm of ghair-zahiri asbab (invisible responses). With the pronounced inadequacy of the physical world, recourse to the meta-physical dominion might lead the way. With generalised theoretical underpinnings gleaned from the Quran...the Pandemic-like calamities are Allah's way of showing us His unhappiness. Otherwise, the Supreme being, the All Powerful, the Omnipotent and the Omnipresent can take life out of our obscure planet in His unimaginably vast universes and kingdoms...in a zillionth of a second. But He would not, till the appointed time; till everyone gets the message for salvation, and till everyone is led to the right path and then allowed to choose the right or the wrong under a free will, bestowed by Him.

In our mostly rationality-driven, science-obsessed world, the above iteration would certainly raise eyebrows. But major religious thought under the Abrahamic Religions attest to His rehman (blessings) bestowed on His creations. Just like the

air that we breathe, the land that we walk upon, or cultivate for food and go back in to; and the sky that unbundles our imagination; and the body that we possess...the harmony and excellence of His creation. This consensus warrants actionable commonality of faith by the otherwise bickering clergy from the three Great Religions, to heal our divisive world.

And talking of the timelines; His timelines are stretched, invisible in life spans and only discernable through belief system. And belief in the unseen is the cornerstone of the edifice of all major religions. And in the 21st Century of earth time (the recorded fraction of it), He...the unseen, decided to be seen through an unseen (the virus). So, if Pakistan and/or some other parts of the world are spared the fate of Italy, India, Iran and/or other countries on account of the severity of the Pandemic, the ghair-zahiri explanation is His rehma. Every other zahiri explanation is questionable.

So besides tying the camel, that we should; recourse to Him and asking for forgiveness and deliverance, we must. And then believe that ajal (the appointed time) is unchanged in time, space and details. Therefore, in addition to gloating over the success of policies by the NCOC (National Command & Operation Center) and this or that strategy (without discounting their effectiveness, of course), a big thank you to Him regularly would go up to the heavens and come down with more blessings.

A 'National Day of Prayer', yearly, is a good idea above and beyond the so many other useless anniversaries. A secular America just celebrated the yearly thanksgiving for the bountiful harvest years ago. Our 'National Day of Prayer', this year, could be combined with renewed focus on the Pandemic; to educate the unknowing and refresh and restrain the culpable. We can find reasons to thank Him each year then; and the reasons are innumerable.

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The Hidden Threat to Globalization By

Niccolo W. Bonifai, Irfan Nooruddin, and

Nita Rudra

Globalization has lost its shine in wealthy countries, particularly among low-skilled workers. From 2002 to 2018, for instance, support for free trade fell significantly in Japan, the United States, and many European countries, driven largely by rising hostility toward free trade among the poor and working classes. Among low-skilled workers in Italy, opposition to free trade grew from nine percent to 28 percent during that period, and it more than tripled among the same group in France. Disapproval among this demographic more than doubled in Japan and in the United States, causing overall support for free trade to fall by more than ten percentage points in those countries. The rising opposition to free trade has fueled successful, inward-looking populist movements, most strikingly in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The reasons for the growing hostility vary, but the most politically potent charge is that globalization has hurt workers in rich countries in order to help those in poorer ones. Donald Trump, for example, won the U.S. presidency in 2016 in part by arguing that Americans were losing their jobs to workers in China, India, and Mexico—what he termed the “greatest job theft in the history of the world.” Marine Le Pen, currently polling second in France’s coming national election, declared during her 2017 campaign that trade with developing economies “has been devastating to the French and European industries” and has “led to the destruction of millions of European jobs.”

It is true that trade agreements have generated economic opportunities in poor countries and have sometimes created pockets of economic loss within wealthy states in the process. But there is something ironic about Western populists’ complaints that globalization has hurt their countries and helped poorer ones. If these leaders seriously examined how people in developing states felt about globalization, they would encounter a familiar situation. As we have illustrated in a new study, differences between support for globalization among high-skilled and low-skilled workers—and gaps in the optimism the two groups feel about

their prospects for upward mobility—have grown in poor countries as well as rich ones. As a result, overall backing for economic integration is eroding.

What accounts for the decline in support for globalization and free trade even in countries that seem to have the most to gain from them? The answer is straightforward: even in the developing world, high-skilled employees have benefited disproportionately from globalization, whereas much of the working class has missed out. Although policymakers promised that trade and international investment would provide widespread upward mobility in developing countries, only a fraction of low-skilled workers have actually seen their earnings meaningfully increase, and the disparity between what these workers expected and what actually happened has generated growing disappointment. In some cases, it has bred outright resentment. So far, the anger has been most pronounced in wealthy countries, such as the United States. But if globalization continues to disproportionately help the rich, the fierce backlash will inevitably spread to poorer states.

This is an outcome that all countries should work to avoid. Irrespective of what Trump, Le Pen, and other populists may claim, workers in rich economies have greatly benefited from globalized markets. By raising manufacturing employment and wages over the last eight decades, trade fueled the United States' rise to global hegemony in the first half of the last century and allowed European states to rebuild their economies after two world wars. And despite their failure to distribute wealth broadly, policies that favor trade and international investment are helping many poorer countries establish middle classes and build robust domestic economies. To keep this system in place, however, countries will have to make it more inclusive of low-skilled workers everywhere—and especially in developing states.

UNKEPT PROMISES

The global economic system was not designed with poor countries in mind. In the aftermath of decolonization, most newly independent states preferred protectionist policies to economic integration with the rest of the world. Following its independence in 1947, for instance, India raised tariffs and instituted capital restrictions to promote local production. Several countries in Latin America adopted import substitution industrialization policies in the 1960s and the 1970s, hoping that high tariffs and protectionism would create homegrown champions that could compete globally. In the 1970s, East Asia's then industrializing

countries, such as South Korea, adopted similar measures under an export-oriented industrialization paradigm with more success, creating domestic powerhouses that spearheaded rapid, export-led growth.

The pressure to lower tariffs and open borders for Western capital, goods, and services came from Washington. Mired in debt and currency crises, developing countries had little choice but to ask the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund for financial assistance. Help did not come cheap. To get foreign investment, governments in developing countries had to swallow painful conditions, pledging to divest from public-sector enterprises; reduce government spending, especially on employment and social insurance; and allow in more international competition. India is a canonical case in point: a balance-of-payments crisis in 1991 forced the country to adopt harsh austerity measures in exchange for IMF funding.

To advance these difficult reforms, leaders cultivated support from poor and working-class citizens, who had been largely excluded from secure government employment and pensions. Globalization, policymakers promised, would mean more jobs, better wages, and greater consumer power for this silent majority. In 2001, responding to IMF demands, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee proposed labor reforms that he argued would make it easier for companies to lay off workers but would ultimately “protect Indian industries and businesses by enabling them to become more competitive, more profitable, grow faster, and, hence, employ more people both directly and indirectly.” (The reforms never went through then, but some are being put in place passed now.) Nearly two decades later, Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa echoed that claim while selling his own painful agreement. To help secure over \$3 billion in foreign investment in early 2018, Mnangagwa enacted a variety of austerity measures, including cuts to fuel and electricity subsidies. Many residents protested, but the president pledged that the tradeoff would be worth it. “We want this country to move forward,” he said. “We want jobs for our children.”

Initially, globalization delivered on these promises. Fresh foreign funds in developing countries created relatively well-paying jobs for a younger generation. Factories, information technology offices, and call centers began opening across the developing world. And although not everyone gained right away, workers still trapped in poverty could reasonably dream that they would soon find better

employment. In the meantime, they could enjoy foreign-branded consumer goods, which had become increasingly affordable and available in local stores.

Developing countries are willing to restrict access to their markets.

But as time has passed, optimism has begun to fade. Support for free trade among the developing world's low-skilled workers remains high, but it is clearly decreasing. Among respondents in South Africa, for example, support dropped from 88 percent to 76 percent between 2002 and 2018. In Brazil, it went from 84 percent to 68 percent. And in Mexico, it fell by a sizable 20 percentage points—from 89 percent to 69 percent. Support also dropped in India, Pakistan, and other developing states.

The story behind this disillusionment will be familiar to anyone who has read about left-behind manufacturing towns in the United States. The mechanisms are different: the angst in “middle America” is for the factories that left, whereas in Brazil and Nigeria, it is for the factories that never arrived. But the process is the same. In both places, low-skilled workers have observed globalization without fully experiencing its gains. The longer this bait and switch persists, the more likely it is that protests will erupt, societal trust will drop, and frustrated citizens will elect opportunistic populists who offer protectionism as a panacea.

Indeed, there are already signs that developing countries are willing to restrict access to their markets. Poor states are acting aggressively to protect their digital interests; India, for example, is considering data localization laws that would force companies to store and process all data gained from Indians within the country. Multiple states are passing laws that require multinational companies to invest in domestic brick-and-mortar operations in exchange for access to their consumer markets. The political logic of such policies is obvious, but the economic logic is unsound. Barriers to the flow of capital, goods, and services across these borders ultimately undermine growth.

If developing states do pull back from the global economic order, it could have disastrous consequences. A withdrawal, for example, would make today's supply chain nightmares seem miniscule: without access to low-cost labor and materials, product prices would sharply increase, fueling worsening inflation. Decoupling the world's economies would also slow job growth by making it more difficult for businesses to expand their operations. This would, in turn, decrease

productivity, hinder innovation, and lower overall economic growth in both rich and poor nations.

IF YOU CAN KEEP IT

Plenty of U.S. scholars and policymakers, especially those who closely followed Trump's rise, are well aware that an angry working class can threaten globalization's gains. To avoid drifting further into isolationism, many have argued that the United States must find new ways to share the upsides of trade with its low-skilled workers. Some Europeans have issued similar calls for their own countries. But to safeguard globalization, rich countries can't just take action at home. They must also make sure that trade and foreign investment help poor workers across the developing world.

In some instances, that will require developed countries to provide greater access to their markets. Protectionism in agriculture among rich countries, for instance, has long made it challenging for less-skilled workers in poorer states to move up the economic ladder. The same goes for protectionism in digital services and the intellectual property rights regimes in rich countries that lock in the advantages of U.S. and European pharmaceutical giants. Both are areas in which developing countries are becoming increasingly competitive, and rich countries could lift millions of people out of poverty at home and abroad if they did not prevent these sectors from experiencing healthy competition from lower-cost producers.

But policymakers in the "global South" also need to act. Many developing states have economic systems that do far too little to help their low-skilled workers, and their governments must make serious reforms. That means enacting and enforcing policies that bolster employee rights, penalizing companies when they violate environmental and social obligations, and making innovative investments in education and training so that workers can compete for better jobs—and, in so doing, enjoy larger shares of the benefits that come from foreign investment. Developing countries should also avoid protectionism, including by not walling off their economies to outside technology businesses. Digital technology and data will help drive economic growth during the next several decades, and developing countries should not be left out.

Fixing globalization requires international collaboration.

None of this will be easy. Global democratic backsliding means that an increasingly large number of politicians cannot be held publicly accountable, and many of the world's leaders are minimally interested in helping the poor. Many countries are controlled by elites who actively redistribute wealth upward to the powerful, including into their own pockets and those of their cronies. And even when policymakers have the right institutional incentives, asking countries to further open their markets is daunting in an era of nationalist backlash. Rich countries will especially struggle to expose their agricultural systems to international competition given the political power of the farm lobbies. Poor countries fear the wrath of small- and medium-sized enterprises threatened by foreign competition.

Yet today's international community has proved that it is capable of taking bold steps to counteract inequality. All 20 of the world's largest economies, for example, have now endorsed a minimum corporate tax—a once unthinkable act of policy coordination that shows how countries can work together to create a fairer society. States should make a similar effort across a range of other policy domains, especially worker protections. Policymakers could begin by requiring that firms receiving government contracts honor collective-bargaining rights throughout their supply chains.

Ultimately, the future of globalization may come down to whether leaders can recognize the stark consequences of failing in this fight and, hence, the necessity of action. Fixing globalization requires international collaboration. It demands that countries commit to difficult economic reforms and public investments even at the cost of vested domestic interests. Otherwise, decades of economic gains could melt away, as billions of the world's poorest citizens watch their patient dreams of prosperity evaporate.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

Iran's Nuclear Strategy By Neville Teller

The parties to the world's nuclear deal with Iran, including Iran itself, have started a new round of discussions – the seventh since April 2021, when newly elected US president Joe Biden initiated meetings aimed at America re-entering an updated agreement. The talks – if you can call a meeting “talks” where the US and Iran do not converse face-to-face but only through intermediaries – reconvened on November 29 in Vienna.

It was in 2015, in an effort to restrain Iran's nuclear program, that the permanent members of the UN Security Council together with Germany concluded an agreement with Iran known as the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action).

No doubt all those involved, including then-US President Barack Obama, had the very best of intentions. They were convinced that with that deal, which incorporated a substantial financial boost to Iran, they had put the regime's nuclear ambitions on hold for at least 15 years, making the world a safer place. Moreover they believed that they had taken an important step toward normalizing relations with Iran – a rogue state proved to have been behind terrorist actions across the world ever since its foundation in 1979 – and bringing it back within the comity of nations.

Donald Trump, soon to be president of the US, disagreed. He believed the deal was flawed and in effect gave Iran the green light to acquire a nuclear arsenal in the comparatively near future. In May 2018 he withdrew the US from the deal and, adopting instead a policy of maximum pressure, imposed sanctions on Iran.

Speaking on January 8, 2020 he said: “They chanted “death to America” the day the agreement was signed. Then Iran went on a terror spree, funded by the money from the deal, and created hell in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The missiles fired last night at us and our allies were paid for with the funds made available by the last administration.”

Much of the world, including the EU and the other parties to the deal, opposed Trump's withdrawal. Biden certainly did. During his presidential campaign he promised, if elected, to move quickly to rejoin the nuclear deal, provided Iran also came back into compliance. In essence that remains the US position, as it

resumes the apparently endless rounds of talks with a regime notably more hardline following the recent Iranian presidential election. The Iranian regime has used the hiatus since June to place new limitations on the UN inspectors of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). The obvious deduction is that Iran has been proceeding apace with its nuclear program in defiance of the deal.

Iran under its new president, Ebrahim Raisi, has already signaled that it does not wish to resume the talks exactly where they left off. Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in October: "We don't want to enter the Vienna negotiations from the deadlock point of the Vienna negotiations".

Iran's already announced position – which does not augur well – is that the US must compensate Iran for its withdrawal from the deal, lift all the sanctions imposed since 2015 at once rather than in phases, and provide assurances that no future US administration will back out of the deal. Given that list of demands, it seems clear that Iran is set on dragging out the negotiating process.

On November 21 Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, traveled to the UK for a 3-day official visit. In a statement ahead of his trip Herzog wrote: "One issue that demands British-Israeli dialogue is Iran's race toward nuclear weapons and regional hegemony. Iran does not want dialogue. It is exploiting the world's willingness to negotiate to buy time. Israel cannot allow the fundamentalists of Tehran to acquire a nuclear bomb. The moderate nations of the Middle East need their allies, including Britain, to engage them in an urgent dialogue on how to stop Iran instead of wasting time on its games."

For 42 years world leaders have been unable, or perhaps unwilling, to acknowledge what motivates the Iranian regime – namely, the philosophy behind its Islamic revolution of 1979. Iran's original Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, affirmed repeatedly that the foundation stone of his convictions, the very purpose of his revolution, was to destroy Western-style democracy and its way of life, and to impose Shia Islam on the whole world. He identified the United States and Israel, together with the USSR, as prime targets.

"We wish to cause the corrupt roots of Zionism, Capitalism and Communism to wither throughout the world," said Khomeini. "We wish, as does God almighty, to destroy the systems which are based on these three foundations, and to promote the Islamic order of the Prophet." By this he meant his strict Shia interpretation of

Islam, for elsewhere he had declared that the holy city of Mecca, situated in the heart of Sunni Saudi Arabia, was in the hands of “a band of heretics”.

Ever since 1979 the world could have recognized, if it had had a mind to, that the Iranian regime was engaged in a focused pursuit of these objectives, quite impervious to any other considerations. Instead wishful thinking has dominated the approach of many of the world’s leaders to Iran, and continues to do so.

“We shall export our revolution to the whole world,” declared Khomeini. “Until the cry ‘there is no god but Allah’ resounds over the whole world, there will be struggle.”

Pursuit of this fundamental purpose of the Islamic Revolution has involved the state – acting either directly or through proxy militant bodies like Hezbollah or the Houthis – in a succession of acts of terror directed not only against Western targets, but against non-Shia Muslims as well. For decades Iran has also made determined efforts to develop nuclear power, with the aim, never openly acknowledged, of producing nuclear weapons as a vital means of achieving its objectives.

The Sunni Arab world knows its main enemy is Iran – the Abraham Accords attest to that. Western leaders want to believe in an accommodation with the regime. A clear-eyed look at the facts shows that this is simply not possible. This Iranian regime is not, and has no intention of ever becoming, one of the comity of civilized nations. To do so would be to negate the fundamental purposes underlying the revolution, purposes to which the ayatollahs remain unshakably committed.

To quote President Herzog: “Iran does not want dialogue. It is exploiting the world’s willingness to negotiate to buy time.”

Source: Published in Eur Asia Review

India's Attempt to Get Back into Afghanistan By Shahid Javed Burki

When the mujahideen fought the Soviet Union troops out of their country, and the Taliban took charge, India decided to sever diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and closed its embassy in Kabul. Pakistan went in the opposite direction. It was one of the three countries to recognise the Taliban-led regime. New Delhi aided the overthrow of the Taliban by developing strong relations with the non-Pashtun groups, in particular the Tajiks and the Uzbeks in the northeast. These two ethnic groups had formed what came to be known as the Northern Alliance. The Alliance provided foot soldiers to America's 2001 move to remove the Taliban from power. In the twenty-year period that followed, the Indian influence in Afghanistan increased.

India was generous in aiding Kabul. It was the biggest regional donor to Afghanistan and fifth largest donor globally with over \$3 billion in assistance. It built over 200 public and private schools, sponsored over 1,000 scholarships, and hosted 16,000 Afghan students. The UNDP partnered with India to train Afghan civil servants. More than 60,000 Afghans returned to help rebuild their country that was left in ruins by the conflict between large ethnic groups — the Pashtuns, the Tajiks and the Uzbeks. India funded 400 small development projects.

Would India's relation with Afghanistan change with the United States pulling out of the country? Would the Taliban headed Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan change the position with respect to India that was followed by the regime headed by President Ashraf Ghani? According to Rakesh Sood, a retired Indian diplomat, "India's geography will ensure our presence though our role will undergo changes. US leaves because it can, India stays because it belongs." Sood believes that the world has long recognised that India has a role to play. "At the 2001 Bonn Conference, India was invited because it had been a key supporter (along with Russia and Iran) of the Northern Alliance that had emerged as an influential player, following the Taliban ouster. During the last twenty years, India's economic cooperation program has earned it the distinction of being Afghanistan's preferred development partner."

In 2011, India became the first country to sign a Strategic Partnership Agreement but New Delhi's involvement in security matters was marginal largely due to the United States and NATO sensitivity about its presence in a major way. Pakistan used its location to lay the ground for close economic relations with its neighbour. As a landlocked county, Afghanistan depended on Pakistan as Karachi was the only port it could access. Recognising the built-in advantage Pakistan had, India sought to develop an alternative route the Afghans could use. It developed the port of Chabahar in Iran and built a 200 kilometer long highway in Afghanistan to link the port with the Iranian border town of Zahedan. According to Sood, this investment was "part of reviving Afghanistan's traditional role as the cross roads between South and Central Asia. Chabahar became part of this regional connectivity. India also spearheaded Afghanistan's membership into the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC)".

Sood went on to place his analysis in the context of the enduring India-Pakistan rivalry. "India's development role was acknowledged by the Afghans and the international community. There was one exception — Pakistan — which tried hard to limit India's role and presence. As Taliban's insurgency grew, India was often targeted. Indians working on road projects were kidnapped and killed, guest houses where Indians stayed were often targeted and in 2008, there was a suicide attack on the embassy in Kabul. Four Indians, including the Defense Attaché, were killed; the bombing also claimed over 50 Afghan lives. Intelligence pointed the finger at the Haqqani group."

India attempted to work its way back into Afghanistan by agreeing to host the third Regional Security Defense Dialogue (RSDD) in New Delhi on September 10, 2021 — less than a month after the Taliban had taken over Kabul. The RSDD is an Iranian initiative which hosted the first two meetings of the forum in 2018 and 2019. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan accepted the Indian invitation issued by its National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval. There were two significant no shows: Pakistan and China. The meeting in India issued what came to be known as the "Delhi Declaration". It asked the Taliban-led government to ensure that its territory "would never become a safe haven for global terrorism". It stressed the need for an "open and truly and inclusive government" and ensuring the "rights of women, children and minority communities".

China has entered the Afghan picture. It is using its enormous public savings to build an impressive road, rail and internet network that would connect it with the parts of the world that are to its west. The multibillion-dollar CPEC project was launched with this objective in Beijing's sights. CPEC is being redefined to increase its scope to include not only Afghanistan but the landlocked countries of Central Asia.

The Taliban have built their political structure on two pillars: ethnicity and religion. They draw their support from the Pashtun population in the country and from their adherence to radical Islam. Looking at relations with India from these two perspectives, it is hard to imagine, that the warmth for India of the Ashraf Ghani era would return. In my long session with Ghani when I visited him in Kabul, I asked him whether religion was a factor in the way he looked at his country's relations with the world outside. He said that religion did not contribute to the way he crafted his dealings with the outside world. That certainly will not be the case with the Taliban in charge in Kabul.

The New York Times wrote a report on how "the erosion of human rights in India has weakened its moral high ground in a region where ethnic and sectarian tensions are worsening. India is losing leverage in South Asia as its government tries to reshape the country into a Hindu state. In marginalising and maligning its minority Muslims at home, Mr Modi has weakened India's traditional role of encouraging harmony in a region of many fault lines." The newspaper looked at the distance India had traveled from a society tolerant of differences, to the one in which only Hinduism is the right way for people to order their lives. "Traditionally, how India — the largest and the most diverse of the nations — tried to manage its affairs set the tone for the rest." That was then; now the Indian leadership has gone on a different route. "The policies of Mr. Modi's party have chipped away at that position, not unlike the erosion of United States' global standing during the Trump administration. His Bhartiya Janata Party has pursued a Hindu-first agenda that has often left the country's Muslims at a disadvantage. The party has also refused to rein in hard-line elements within its ranks, sometimes leading to violence."

Aparna Pande, director of the India initiative at Washington-based Hudson Institute, who had lauded India as a pluralistic example of governance now finds that Narendra Modi's "neighborhood first" policy is at odds with backlashes caused by the Hindu nationalist vision at home. "If you are pushing a nationalist

narrative, it is difficult to then ask your neighbors not to do the same,” she wrote in a comment published by her institute. “You will then see every country in South Asia becoming more nationalist and forget about anything else, that creates a strategic challenge for India.”

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Where Will Afghanistan be in a Year? By

Kamran Yousaf

It's been over 100 days since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul. The international community, particularly the west, is still grappling with the key question: should they recognise the Taliban government or wait until the insurgent group fulfills their expectations? While they try to solve this puzzle, the people of Afghanistan are suffering. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, is appealing for much more support amid acute and rising humanitarian needs for 3.5 million people displaced by conflict inside Afghanistan — including 700,000 who were displaced in 2021.

“The humanitarian crisis is escalating daily in Afghanistan. Hunger in the country has reached truly unprecedented levels. Nearly 23 million people — that's 55 per cent of the population — are facing extreme levels of hunger, and nearly 9 million of them are at risk of famine,” according to the UN assessment.

The international community is making pledges and even the US, which otherwise blocked \$9.5 billion assets of the Afghan Central Bank, is willing to provide humanitarian assistance. Pakistan and India joined hands for the sake of Afghan citizens. Pakistan allowed India to use its land route for the transportation of 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan. It is important to note this exception was created only for the people of Afghanistan as otherwise Pakistan does not allow India to export goods to Afghanistan using the Wagah crossing. Yet, all these measures may not be enough to avert another crisis in Afghanistan, which has seen four decades of war, unrest and bloodshed.

Taliban for now controlled most parts of the country and there has been no resistance to their rule other than the threat posed by Daesh Khorasan. But can the Taliban achieve sustainable peace? In 2001 when the US-led international alliance removed the Taliban from power, there was euphoria that Afghanistan might be entering a new era of peace and prosperity. Afghan Taliban were in total disarray and foot soldiers were willing to reconcile. But the US wanted to avenge the 9/11 attacks and was not interested in any grand reconciliation. Even former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf, who was the US ally, advised the same to then US President Bush to speak to the Afghan Taliban. The opportunity

was lost and the Afghan Taliban gradually regrouped and eventually forced the US to strike a withdrawal deal on their terms. Such was the swiftness of the Taliban victory that the US and its allies even could not evacuate their nationals and others.

But soon the euphoria of their victory over the superpower would be replaced by harsh realities. For over 20 years the Afghan Taliban successfully fought the war against the US and foreign forces but now suddenly they need to transform themselves from an insurgent group to the one that governs the country. And this has to happen at a time when Afghanistan's economy is facing a precarious situation. The Taliban government does not have enough money to pay salaries to the government employees. Next 6 to 12 months are going to be critical. The likely scenario is that the initial enthusiasm of the international community may recede. The US is in no mood to pump in any more investment or funding. China is keen to help but will not take the plunge without stability. The Gulf countries can provide some funding but it is unlikely to make a difference in a manner that the Afghan economy stands on its feet.

Economic collapse appears imminent. Empty stomachs provide perfect breeding ground for extremists like Daesh to lure common Afghans. As happened in the past, the administration in Kabul always faces some form of resistance. By the end of 2022 one may see resistance emerge in Afghanistan against the Taliban rule. If history is any guide, long-term peace and stability will remain a distant dream in Afghanistan!

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What do Indo-Russia Ties Mean for the US?

By Prof. Abdul Shakoor Shah

India-Russia defense and trade ties for the next decade are seemingly going to shift power in south Asia in near future. It is notable that after the US decampment from Afghanistan, Russia has entered in Asian power ring. The Indian draconian thirst for absolute regional power is quite obvious from current strategic agreements. India-Russia has already set a target of \$30 billion in bilateral trade by 2025. Indian-US ventures to counter China are considered critical and Russian entry to make a triangle is really of great significance. Russia has expressed its concerns over block formation by the U.S, India, Japan and Australia to intercede China in the Indo-Pacific region. It seems, Russia is not there to build a triangle but it has some other goals. Now India has plunged between the devil and the deep sea. Though it tries its utmost to play on both sides, it seems irrational to invite the bull into a china shop. Indian cold war weapon dependency on Russia compelled the reluctant India to shake hands with the US. During the Donald Trump era the U.S-India accomplished defense deals worth over \$3 billion. Bilateral defense trade increased from near zero in 2008 to \$15 billion in 2019.

India's acquisition of Russian S-400 missile systems, which it mulls over to be critical in offsetting China, could prove to be an annoyance in Indo-U.S. ties. Moscow has put India at risk of U.S. sanctions. Moscow-Delhi hand shake it multi fold either the India-US bond is weakening or India has realized that she has put herself in cynical hands as the US is notorious for its fair weather friendship. India seems to be realigning its defense strategy in the China-Russia-USA triangle. India aspires to be Eurasian muscle vacillating between East and West in accordance with its preferences. India has become a rolling stone among military ties of Moscow, the economic importance of Beijing and strategic counterweight of the U.S. The contemporary global situation is the rise of China and the conversion of the Sino-Russian relationship from antagonism to détente and now entente.

Sino-Russian enmity or amity carries global consequences. Both developments have a burnt on India, the earlier historically, and the latter in vista. Russia had enjoyed long and durable ties with India than the U.S in boosting up her military

profile and precious political support to India on an array of regional matters. Sino-Russian had been transferring military technologies in the past as well, now they are exchanging economic ties based on cross border trade and Chinese investment in Russia. The Sino-Russia positive ties may melt the Sino-India hostility and the U.S will be pushed back to home like the Afghanistan strategy. There is a possibility of a new triangle like RIC groups Russia, India and China. Russian bending to India is the gleam of hope to balance China and push the U.S out of the region. India had defied the United States and created a non-aligned bloc of nations to maintain a middle posture between the two rivals in the Cold War. But the Russian cold shouldering pushed reluctant India to join hands with the US. The US is left with no other option than India to counter China and the same is the case with India for materializing her dreams of Asian supremacy. During Sino-India border tension in the late 1950s, India was equipped with supersonic Mig-21 jets, AN-12 transports and Mi-4 helicopters by Russia. During the Sino-Soviet rift Russia further equipped India with submarines, corvettes, tanks and artillery and helped India to stave off US-Chinese pressure in 1971. The Soviet collapse at the end of 1991 hit New Delhi mainly hard. But the heft of their relationship is inadequate by the fact that by 2015-16, India only constituted 1.2 % of total Russian trade, while Russia was only 1 % of Indian trade. The NATO expansion in the west and the presence of the United States in Afghanistan brought Moscow-Beijing closer than before. The Russian pouncing may serve to alleviate U.S and Chinese gravitational pull. The current ties are a result of the Russia-Europe and China-US estrangement. But things can take over in turn as in the past 60 years. Russia and China have been friends at one time enemies at another, likewise, the US/Europe and Russia.

India is the only one that has remained largely with the same perspective that it had in the 1950s. It is in the best interests of the U.S to keep Russia and China apart and Russian aligning with the U.S is almost impossible particularly in Asian rink.

India is the only one that has remained largely with the same perspective that it had in the 1950s. It is in the best interests of the U.S to keep Russia and China apart and Russian aligning with the U.S is almost impossible particularly in Asian rink. India must refrain from putting all its eggs into American baskets. Chinese relationship to Central Asia is undermining the Russian influence in the region, the Indo-Russia ties may improve it via Indo-Iran influence in central Asia. Indo-Russian ties are also the result of India's reluctance to US or Japanese notion of

free and open Indo pacific (FOIP). India must realize that joining the U.S camp will cause Indian worth as it not only loses Chinese collaboration but it will also get a severe jolt from Russia. That kind of divergence between New Delhi and Moscow used to be virtually unthinkable. India has long had a warm relationship with Russia, and the Soviet Union before it, rooted in a sense of enduring convergence of interests at both the global and regional levels. When the United States and Britain allied with India's archrival Pakistan starting in the 1950s, New Delhi deeply appreciated Moscow's support, including arms deliveries and its veto on Kashmir-related issues in the Security Council. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia remained India's main international political partner. As that much celebrated convergence breaks down, New Delhi is now learning to live with growing divergence with Moscow on key regional and global issues. Moscow has jumped to New Delhi with the intention of minimizing Beijing-Delhi tensions to avert Indian bending to the U.S as it is not favoring Russia. Indo-Russia ties are also the expression of India's disparate depression of the US decamping from Afghanistan. Now the Indian profile in Afghanistan has shattered to pieces. Russia is growing its ties with Taliban, Pakistan and China and it seems wise for India to realign itself with Russia and China rather than the U.S.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

Shifting Tides in the Middle East By Azhar

Azam

Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) maintained warm economic, cultural and political ties until relations descended into deep animosity in 2010 over Ankara's support for the Arab Spring and the Muslim Brotherhood's government in Cairo. Turkey backed the Islamist organisation while Saudi Arabia and the UAE opposed its rule. Broad approval of the pan-Islamic religious movement in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria was perceived as a threat to the dynastic rule in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Qatar, another hereditary state, endorsed Mohamed Morsi before he was overthrown by Egyptian army in 2013 and died during a trial over charges of espionage in 2019.

Qatar's diplomatic crisis, Jamal Khashoggi's killing, competition for influence in Sudan and exchange of accusations to undermine the Palestinian cause deteriorated Saudi-Turkish relationship even further. Each of them wanted to lead the Muslim world. Ankara's pursuit of irredentist and neo-Ottoman ideology across the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and Caucasus widened the trust deficit. Nevertheless, Turkey and Saudi Arabia managed to find consensus on Syria where they backed the opposition forces. Notwithstanding the differences on the Brotherhood, the US — through one of the costliest CIA covert programmes, Timber Sycamore, in Syria — managed to align regional rivals in 2013 and started to deliver lethal assistance to 50 vetted opposition factions. The operation, staffed by representatives from America, France, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, conked out as patrons supported their favoured groups. Resultantly, the US policy in Syria failed and many CIA-supplied weapons ended up in the hands of Al-Qaeda.

In March 2015, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan supported the Saudi-led mission in Yemen and slammed Iran for trying to dominate the region by following a sectarian agenda and backing the Houthi rebels, demanding of Tehran to withdraw forces from Yemen, Syria and Iraq. There are speculations that Ankara can still intervene in Sana'a affairs over requests to jump into the fray from the Al-Islah Party — the Yemeni affiliate of the Brotherhood that ostensibly played an important role to cool tensions between Saudi Arabia and Turkey and whose cooperation in the conflict Abu Dhabi has long opposed.

In December 2017, ties between Ankara and Abu Dhabi plunged to a new low after Erdogan, without naming the UAE foreign minister, chided him as an “impudent” nouveau riche after he shared a tweet denouncing Ottoman leader, Fakhreddin Pasha, of stealing money and manuscripts from Madinah in 1916. In turn, Abu Dhabi stressed that the Arab world “will not be led by Tehran or Ankara”.

Egypt, the UAE and Turkey have been at odds on multiple fronts in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Last year, bickering turned into fierce diplomatic spat once Abu Dhabi indicted Ankara for interference in Libya, and Turkey claimed that the UAE was assisting Al-Shabab militants in Somalia while Egypt was “trying to destabilise the whole region”.

Erdogan, who threatened to suspend diplomatic relations with the Emirates on normalising relations with Israel, seems to tow the UAE line as he recently agreed to minimise “differences of opinion” and emphasised on a “mutually beneficial” relationship with Tel Aviv in a phone talk with his Israeli counterpart, Isaac Herzog. The US’s consistent deprioritisation, reduced engagement and phased pullback from the greater Middle East that started under Obama, adopted by Trump and being followed by Biden to shift focus on a theatre of strategic importance — i.e. the Asia-Pacific — propelled countries for a wider regional rapprochement. Qatar’s blockade by the Arab quartet — Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt — which demanded that Doha downgrade diplomatic ties with Tehran and close a Turkish military base on Qatari soil was withdrawn and diplomatic relations were restored in January. After lifting the embargo, Abu Dhabi said it didn’t “cherish any feuds” and expressed willingness to bury the hatchet with Ankara.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavusoglu gave an affirmative response and said that contacts between Ankara and Cairo had been restored since the two regional powers sparred and broke off in 2013. Tensions eased between Egypt and Turkey once the Turkish government forbade three Brotherhood-linked TV channels in the country from airing criticism against Cairo.

In a glaring move, Erdogan bypassed diplomatic protocol and personally received the UAE National Security Advisor, Tahnoun bin Zayedon, on August 18. The “historical and positive” meeting, focused on cooperation and economic partnership, was a *carpe diem* moment for Ankara that helped an increasingly

isolated Turkey to recalibrate relations with the Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to launch a charm offensive to curry favour with Abu Dhabi for “serious” investments.

A rare phone call between Erdogan and the UAE de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Zayed, on August 31 further opened up the way for new wider regional reconciliation. Abu Dhabi profited from the détente too since it has been seeking to shore up Middle East collaboration under Washington’s steady withdrawal from the region.

The cost of the bitter Turkey-UAE rivalry — which fueled conflict in Libya, tested their relations on the Brotherhood and their allies in Syria and Tunisia, and pushed to vie for influence in Somalia — is particularly high for Ankara where stubbornly high inflation has reached 19% forcing the central bank to sell \$128 billion forex reserves to support the free-falling Lira.

The establishment of a \$10 billion fund by the UAE in Turkey and cooperation agreements between the two countries would shift the trend from conflicts to economic issues. The pivot to the economy and possible swap deals should support the Lira, which has shed 45% of its value this year, and set the tone for other countries to follow and contribute to region’s stability and growth.

The UAE has been trying to cap rivalries with both Turkey and Iran as the Gulf state hones in on a post-pandemic economy after the US retreat from Afghanistan provided a “very worrying test” about the opaque US commitment.

After Abu Dhabi said it would take steps to de-escalate tensions with Tehran, bilateral rifts took a backseat during the Iranian officials’ visit to the UAE as the two sides agreed to work for regional stability and prosperity. In a latest diplomatic overture, the UAE’s top diplomat reached Damascus and threw trust behind the Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad. Meanwhile, Erdogan is keen to enhance ties with Saudi Arabia and make use of the “close cooperation” for regional peace, stability and prosperity. Albeit expressing strong reservations about resumption of talks on the Iran nuclear deal, Riyadh intends to continue negotiations with Tehran.

Washington’s allies in the Arabian Peninsula have voiced their “angst” to the Biden administration on the declining US commitment to the region. The US President’s snub to the greater Middle East at the “Summit for Democracy” further establishes his lagging interest in the region and would accelerate this novel, localised framework of cooperation and broader regional rapprochement.

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Washington Is Preparing for the Wrong War With China By Hal Brands and Michael Beckley

The United States is getting serious about the threat of war with China. The U.S. Department of Defense has labeled China its primary adversary, civilian leaders have directed the military to develop credible plans to defend Taiwan, and President Joe Biden has strongly implied that the United States would not allow that island democracy to be conquered.

Yet Washington may be preparing for the wrong kind of war. Defense planners appear to believe that they can win a short conflict in the Taiwan Strait merely by blunting a Chinese invasion. Chinese leaders, for their part, seem to envision rapid, paralyzing strikes that break Taiwanese resistance and present the United States with a *fait accompli*. Both sides would prefer a splendid little war in the western Pacific, but that is not the sort of war they would get.

A war over Taiwan is likely to be long rather than short, regional rather than local, and much easier to start than to end. It would expand and escalate, as both countries look for paths to victory in a conflict neither side can afford to lose. It would also present severe dilemmas for peacemaking and high risks of going nuclear. If Washington doesn't start preparing to wage, and then end, a protracted conflict now, it could face catastrophe once the shooting starts.

IMPENDING SLUGFEST

A U.S.-Chinese war over Taiwan would begin with a bang. China's military doctrine emphasizes coordinated operations to "paralyze the enemy in one stroke." In the most worrying scenario, Beijing would launch a surprise missile attack, hammering not only Taiwan's defenses but also the naval and air forces that the United States has concentrated at a few large bases in the western Pacific. Simultaneous Chinese cyberattacks and antisatellite operations would sow chaos and hinder any effective U.S. or Taiwanese response. And the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would race through the window of opportunity, staging amphibious and airborne assaults that would overwhelm Taiwanese

resistance. By the time the United States was ready to fight, the war would effectively be over.

The Pentagon's planning increasingly revolves around preventing this scenario, by hardening and dispersing the U.S. military presence in Asia, encouraging Taiwan to field asymmetric capabilities that can inflict a severe toll on Chinese attackers, and developing the ability to blunt the PLA's offensive capabilities and sink an invasion fleet. This planning is predicated on the critical assumption that the early weeks, if not days, of fighting would determine whether a free Taiwan survives.

Yet whatever happens at the outset, a conflict almost certainly wouldn't end quickly. Most great-power wars since the Industrial Revolution have lasted longer than expected, because modern states have the resources to fight on even when they suffer heavy losses. Moreover, in hegemonic wars—clashes for dominance between the world's strongest states—the stakes are high, and the price of defeat may seem prohibitive. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, wars between leading powers—the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War, the world wars—were protracted slugfests. A U.S.-Chinese war would likely follow this pattern.

If Washington doesn't prepare for conflict now, it could face catastrophe once the shooting starts.

If the United States managed to beat back a Chinese assault against Taiwan, Beijing wouldn't simply give up. Starting a war over Taiwan would be an existential gamble: admitting defeat would jeopardize the regime's legitimacy and President Xi Jinping's hold on power. It would also leave China more vulnerable to its enemies and destroy its dreams of regional primacy. Continuing a hard fight against the United States would be a nasty prospect, but quitting while China was behind would seem even worse.

Washington would also be inclined to fight on if the war were not going well. Like Beijing, it would view a war over Taiwan as a fight for regional dominance. The fact that such a war would probably begin with a Pearl Harbor-style missile attack on U.S. bases would make it even harder for an outraged American populace and its leaders to accept defeat. Even if the United States failed to prevent Chinese forces from seizing Taiwan, it couldn't easily bow out of the war. Quitting without first severely damaging Chinese air and naval power in Asia

would badly weaken Washington's reputation, as well as its ability to defend remaining allies in the region.

Both sides would have the capacity to keep fighting, moreover. The United States could summon ships, planes, and submarines from other theaters and use its command of the Pacific beyond the first island chain—which runs from Japan in the north through Taiwan and the Philippines to the south—to conduct sustained attacks on Chinese forces. For its part, China could dispatch its surviving air, naval, and missile forces for a second and third assault on Taiwan and press its maritime militia of coast guard and fishing vessels into service. Both the United States and China would emerge from these initial clashes bloodied but not exhausted, increasing the likelihood of a long, ugly war.

BIGGER, LONGER, MESSIER

When great-power wars drag on, they get bigger, messier, and more intractable. Any conflict between the United States and China is likely to force both countries to mobilize their economies for war. After the initial salvos, both sides would hurry to replace munitions, ships, submarines, and aircraft lost in the early days of fighting. This race would strain both countries' industrial bases, require the reorientation of their economies, and invite nationalist appeals—or government compulsion—to mobilize the populace to support a long fight.

Long wars also escalate as the combatants look for new sources of leverage. Belligerents open new fronts and rope additional allies into the fight. They expand their range of targets and worry less about civilian casualties. Sometimes they explicitly target civilians, whether by bombing cities or torpedoing civilian ships. And they use naval blockades, sanctions, and embargoes to starve the enemy into submission. As China and the United States unloaded on each other with nearly every tool at their disposal, a local war could turn into a whole-of-society brawl that spans multiple regions.

Bigger wars demand more grandiose aims. The greater the sacrifices required to win, the better the ultimate peace deal must be to justify those sacrifices. What began as a U.S. campaign to defend Taiwan could easily turn into an effort to render China incapable of new aggression by completely destroying its offensive military power. Conversely, as the United States inflicted more damage on China, Beijing's war aims could grow from conquering Taiwan to pushing Washington out of the western Pacific altogether.

All of this would make forging peace more difficult. The expansion of war aims narrows the diplomatic space for a settlement and produces severe bloodshed that fuels intense hatred and mistrust. Even if U.S. and Chinese leaders grew weary of fighting, they might still struggle to find a mutually acceptable peace.

GOING NUCLEAR

A war between China and the United States would differ from previous hegemonic wars in one fundamental respect: both sides have nuclear weapons. This would create disincentives to all-out escalation, but it could also, paradoxically, compound the dangers inherent in a long war.

For starters, both sides might feel free to shoot off their conventional arsenals under the assumption that their nuclear arsenals would shield them from crippling retaliation. Scholars call this the “stability-instability paradox,” whereby blind faith in nuclear deterrence risks unleashing a massive conventional war. Chinese military writings often suggest that the PLA could wipe out U.S. bases and aircraft carriers in East Asia while China’s nuclear arsenal deterred U.S. attacks on the Chinese mainland. On the flip side, some American strategists have called for pounding Chinese mainland bases at the outset of a conflict in the belief that U.S. nuclear superiority would deter China from responding in kind. Far from preventing a major war, nuclear weapons could catalyze one.

Once that war is underway, it could plausibly go nuclear in three distinct ways. Whichever side is losing might use tactical nuclear weapons—low-yield warheads that could destroy specific military targets without obliterating the other side’s homeland—to turn the tide. That was how the Pentagon planned to halt a Soviet invasion of central Europe during the Cold War, and it is what North Korea, Pakistan, and Russia have suggested they would do if they were losing a war today. If China crippled U.S. conventional forces in East Asia, the United States would have to decide whether to save Taiwan by using tactical nuclear weapons against Chinese ports, airfields, or invasion fleets. This is no fantasy: the U.S. military is already developing nuclear-tipped, submarine-launched cruise missiles that could be used for such purposes.

A local war could turn into a whole-of-society brawl that spans multiple regions.

China might also use nuclear weapons to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. The PLA has embarked on an unprecedented expansion of its nuclear arsenal,

and PLA officers have written that China could use nuclear weapons if a conventional war threatened the survival of its government or nuclear arsenal—which would almost surely be the case if Beijing was losing a war over Taiwan. Perhaps these unofficial claims are bluffs. Yet it is not difficult to imagine that if China faced the prospect of humiliating defeat, it might fire off a nuclear weapon (perhaps at or near the huge U.S. military base on Guam) to regain a tactical advantage or shock Washington into a cease-fire.

As the conflict drags on, either side could also use the ultimate weapon to end a grinding war of attrition. During the Korean War, American leaders repeatedly contemplated dropping nuclear bombs on China to force it to accept a cease-fire. Today, both countries would have the option of using limited nuclear strikes to compel a stubborn opponent to concede. The incentives to do so could be strong, given that whichever side pulls the nuclear trigger first might gain a major advantage.

A final route to nuclear war is inadvertent escalation. Each side, knowing that escalation is a risk, may try to limit the other's nuclear options. The United States could, for instance, try to sink China's ballistic missile submarines before they hide in the deep waters beyond the first island chain. Yet such an attack could put China in a "use it or lose it" situation with regard to its nuclear forces, especially if the United States also struck China's land-based missiles and communication systems, which intermingle conventional and nuclear forces. In this scenario, China's leaders might use their nuclear weapons rather than risk losing that option altogether.

AVOIDING ARMAGEDDON

There is no easy way to prepare for a long war whose course and dynamics are inherently unpredictable. Yet the United States and its allies can do four things to get ready for whatever comes—and, hopefully, prevent the worst from happening. First, Washington can win the race to reload. China will be much less likely to go to war if it knows it will be outgunned as the conflict drags on. Washington and Taipei should therefore aggressively stockpile ammunition and supplies. For the United States, the critical assets are missiles capable of sinking China's most valuable ships and aircraft from afar. For Taiwan, the key weapons are short-range missiles, mortars, mines, and rocket launchers that can decimate invasion fleets. Both nations also need to be ready to churn out new weapons in wartime. Taiwanese factories will be obvious targets for Chinese missiles, so the

United States should enlist the industrial might of other allies. Japan's shipbuilding capacity, for example, could be retooled to produce simple missile barges rapidly and on a massive scale.

Second, the United States and Taiwan can demonstrate their ability to hang tough. In a long war, China could try to strangle Taiwan with a blockade, bombard it into submission, or take down U.S. and Taiwanese electrical grids and telecommunications networks with cyberattacks. It could use conventionally armed, hypersonic missiles to attack targets in the U.S. homeland and flood the United States with disinformation. Countering such measures will require defensive preparations, such as securing critical networks; expanding Taiwan's system of civilian shelters; and enlarging the island's stockpiles of fuel, food, and medical supplies.

China might use nuclear weapons to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Breaking a Chinese campaign of coercion also requires threatening Beijing with painful retaliation. A third objective, therefore, is to own the escalation ladder. By preparing to blockade Chinese commerce and cut Beijing off from markets and technology in wartime, the United States and its allies can threaten to turn an extended conflict into an economic catastrophe for China. By preparing to sink Chinese naval vessels anywhere in the western Pacific and destroy Chinese military infrastructure in other regions, Washington can threaten a generation's worth of Chinese military modernization. And by developing the means to hit Chinese ports, airfields, and armadas with tactical nuclear weapons, the United States can deter China from initiating limited nuclear attacks. Washington should confront Beijing with a basic proposition: the longer a war lasts, the more devastation China will suffer.

Because controlling escalation will be essential, the United States also needs options that allow it to dial up the punishment without necessarily dialing up the violence. By subtly demonstrating that it has the cyber-capabilities to cripple China's critical infrastructure and domestic security system, for example, the United States can threaten to bring the war home to Beijing. Similarly, by improving its ability to suppress Chinese air defenses near Taiwan with cyberattacks, electronic warfare, and directed-energy weapons, the United States can increase its freedom of action while limiting the amount of physical destruction it wreaks on the mainland.

Any escalatory moves risk ratcheting up the intensity of a conflict. So the final preparation Washington must make is to define victory down. A war between nuclear-armed great powers would not end with regime change or one side occupying the other's capital. It would end with a negotiated compromise. The simplest settlement would be a return to the status quo: China stops attacking Taiwan in exchange for a pledge that the island will not seek formal independence and that the United States will not endorse it. To sweeten the deal, Washington could offer to keep its forces off Taiwan and out of the Taiwan Strait. Xi would be able to tell the Chinese people that he taught his enemies a lesson. The United States would have saved a strategically positioned democracy. That may not be a satisfying end to a hard-fought conflict. But in a long war between great powers, protecting vital U.S. interests while avoiding Armageddon is good enough.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

Escaping North Korea Under Kim Jong-Un –

Analysis By Jay Song

As of September 2021, data from the South Korean Ministry of Reunification suggest that 33,800 North Korean defectors currently live in South Korea. This number has soared over the past two decades — before 1998, they numbered under 200.

Following the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the devastating famine in North Korea in the mid-1990s, the turn of the century saw an influx of North Korean arrivals into South Korea rise each year, reaching its peak in 2009 at 2914. Since Kim Jong-un took power in 2012, the flow has largely stagnated and decreased, with COVID-19 reaching an all-time low.

Following Kim's succession, annual arrivals have not exceeded 1600. In 2020, with increased border restrictions due to COVID-19, only 229 entrants were recorded. A number of factors explain this. The first is strengthened border control between North Korea and China. In the 1990s and 2000s, there were few barbed wire barricades across the exit route of choice, the Tuman river separating both countries. But under Kim's regime, both China and North Korea have heightened border security with more fences and checkpoints.

Increased social surveillance practices in China have also amplified the challenges facing defectors once they enter. In 2012, with China amending border laws affecting North Korean defectors, efforts to locate them have increased. Without official identification, it is extremely difficult to move around China without attracting suspicion. The adoption of AI-driven face recognition CCTV systems and other systems of social control have further restricted the mobility of defectors hoping to avoid detection. If they are caught and repatriated, there are detrimental consequences, individually and for their families.

Gender disparity across the North Korean migrants in South Korea is another clear dimension. From 2002, women have comprised 75 to 85 per cent of defectors in South Korea. This is a product of social norms in North Korean society. While all men in North Korea must complete at least 10 years of military service, women with middle or high school education are enlisted only between

the ages of 17 and 22. Women are relatively more mobile and are more commonly involved in entrepreneurial and informal trading activities across the Chinese border. This likewise exposes women and children to increased risks of human trafficking, and many were sold as wives or cheap domestic labour during the famine and post-famine periods.

Changes in South Korean entry requirements for verifying the identity of self-claimed North Korean refugees is another challenge. These changes are attributed to fears of North Korean espionage and the propensity of Korean-Chinese to enter South Korea falsely claiming defector status to receive government subsidies and more favourable work and residence rights than those of other foreign migrants. The South Korean government also changed the scale and nature of various subsidy schemes for North Korean defectors. Instead of outright cash payments, it now provides incentives that are tied to education, training and employment for long-term settlement and capacity building.

Fees for brokering services to cross borders via land, sea or air have also increased dramatically. In the 2000s, fees per person were around US\$3–4000. Now they have skyrocketed to US\$20,000. The air route has become largely inaccessible as faking Chinese passports is almost impossible. This has significantly restricted the number of individuals who can afford to leave.

Despite the barriers, North Koreans still have significant motivation for defecting. According to the 2020 survey by the Hana Foundation, the biggest driver for leaving North Korea was the food shortage, followed by political repression, a better environment for families, family reunion, economic opportunities, secondary family migration, personal security and recommendation from others. Family-related motivations have become a dominant pull factor for North Korean migration to South Korea under Kim.

Life satisfaction levels among North Korean migrants in South Korea are moderately high. Male defectors identify South Korea's competitive society as a main source of unhappiness, while women attribute life dissatisfaction to family separation. One in five North Koreans have experienced discrimination in South Korea. Teenagers commonly point to their low-income status, while older North Koreans attribute this to incompatible skillsets compared to their South Korean peers.

Some North Koreans prefer to undertake onward migration to Western countries. According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the top destination countries for North Korean asylum applications in the past 10 years were Canada, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Russia and the Netherlands. Despite their strong human rights campaigns against North Korea, the United States has not accepted many North Korean refugees.

Migration in contexts like these elsewhere around the world is characterised by natural selection for survival. North Koreans are not unique in this respect. Humans have always tried to move to new locations where more freedom, safety and a higher quality of life are available. Families and social networks play key roles in facilitating and reality the choice for mobility. States have likewise always sought to control people's inbound and outbound movements, especially in times of crisis.

For ordinary North Koreans life proceeds from crisis to crisis, rooted in patterns that stem back to the Korean War. As North Korea tightens border restrictions to prioritise regime survival — a strategy compounded by pervasive restrictions in neighbouring countries due to COVID-19 — most of its citizens simply seeking to survive will continue to face an uphill battle.

*About the author: Jay Song is Korea Foundation Senior Lecturer in Korean Studies at the Asia Institute in the University of Melbourne. This work is funded by the Academy of Korean Studies.

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Russia-China Alliance Poses Defining Challenge For The West – OpEd By Andrew Hammond

Russian President Vladimir Putin had been isolated on Ukraine in a series of major summits throughout December, but that changed significantly on Wednesday when his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping offered his strong support, strengthening an emerging Moscow-Beijing axis.

The Chinese premier's alliance with Putin — one of the key factors emboldening Russian foreign policy in recent years — has significant implications not only for geopolitics but also the global economy. With both men potentially in power until well into the 2030s, they may well be seen by future historians as the two dominant figures in international relations in the first three to four decades of the 21st century.

The warmth of bilateral ties is very much driven by the apparent personal camaraderie between the two. Putin, who refused to travel to the G20 or COP26 summits in recent weeks, on Wednesday highlighted his delight at plans to attend the Beijing Winter Olympics next February when much of the West will stage a diplomatic boycott to protest China's human rights record. Xi clearly welcomes Putin's support, saying that "both sides should strengthen coordination and cooperation on international affairs to make louder voices on global governance."

On Ukraine, Xi left no doubt where he stands, saying that he "understands Russia's concerns to work out security guarantees," given NATO's perceived encroachment on Moscow's former territories. He added that "both China and Russia need to carry out more joint actions to more effectively safeguard our security and interests" against the Western powers, and expressed his appreciation that Putin "strongly supported Beijing's efforts to protect key national interests and firmly opposed attempts to drive a wedge between our countries."

The standoff on the Ukraine border may die down again in 2022, as happened in spring when Russian troops last mobilized there in their tens of thousands, but

that is by no means guaranteed. Putin's mission since assuming power almost a quarter of a century ago has been to restore Russia's geopolitical prominence through international gambits such as the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Syria.

Putin is also targeting Africa, seeking to restore Moscow's influence in the region that faded after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He is keen to entrench Russia's economic and political foothold in the continent, with bilateral trade having risen significantly in the past decade.

While Putin's foreign policy escapades have — so far at least — generally played well domestically, they have resulted in much frostier relations with the West. A key question in coming years is how the relationship, specifically with the US, will fare under President Joe Biden, who will remain in office until at least early 2025, but may not choose to seek re-election when he is his 80s.

As last week's Biden-Putin summit highlighted, the most likely outcome is continuing frosty ties. Putin, at 69, may already be thinking ahead to the next US president, hoping for another maverick figure more congenial to his interests, potentially even Donald Trump again. The Russian leader knows that he could yet see out several more US leaders if he wins two more terms of office by which time he would surpass even Joseph Stalin's time in power.

Yet, while Putin appears to be firmly entrenched, if not impregnable, numerous challenges remain. The pandemic, for one, has posed a major problem, particularly after a wave of infections in recent weeks.

This underlines that Putin is far from certain to serve till 2036, especially if his political luck finally goes south, fueled by potential foreign policy misadventure or domestic economic travails. To keep his hold in power, it seems likely that Putin will continue to rely on the playbook that has served him well so far — namely, forging a sense of post-Cold War patriotism of which the current build-up in Ukraine may be only the latest example.

This could have profound implications, especially given his growing closeness to Xi, who is another potential “president for life.” The closeness of their relationship is one key reason the frost appears unlikely to thaw in Russia's relations with the West. In this context, Putin is increasingly asserting Russian power in other

areas of the globe from Asia-Pacific to Africa and the Americas, doubling down support for longstanding allies who are Western foes, including Venezuela, Syria, North Korea and Iran.

The implications of Putin's long period in office go well beyond the Russian domestic political landscape and Ukraine. The key foreign legacy of his presidency is likely to be a significantly closer relationship with Beijing, which poses a much broader, potentially defining, challenge for the West in the coming decades.

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The Iran Deadlock | Editorial

It is not surprising that Iran's response to any of the Western powers on a nuclear deal is less than friendly. The seventh round of talks in Vienna to restore Iran's 2015 nuclear deal has ended and the negotiating world powers are not close to an agreement.

Why should the global community have seen this coming? Firstly, there is the evident fact that Iran's government has seen a major change. There has been the arrival of a new government in Iran, which is markedly different; the new President Ebrahim Raisi is reported to be more conservative and hardline than the previous Rouhani government. The Raisi foreign policy was always expected to be firmer and more unforgiving.

Secondly, world powers must also be cognisant of the fact that what is happening on the diplomatic stage with other countries affects any potential transactions in the region. Escalations of the European Union and the US with Russia or China are bound to have an impact on Iran's approach towards reconciliation over nuclear matters.

The result is the current scenario. Talks have come to a stale point, with both sides frustrated. The Iranian side, aggravated by US' initial betrayal and the developments occurring in the region, wants significant changes to the agreement and lifting of all sanctions.

The UK, France and Germany, also representing the US, have adopted a more rigid position, asking Tehran to return to the original deal. Iran has granted repaired cameras at nuclear facilities, but the European powers expect that the programme is at its most advanced stage.

What is missing most is an inherent lack of trust between the parties. If the EU wants Iran to back down this, it should consider the carrot approach, rather than the stick, which has been shown to fail. The EU must also bring the US back to the fold and look to ease some sanctions to allow for more trust by Iran, and rather the whole region, to be built.

Source: Published in The Nation

The Growing Threat of Nukes By António

Guterres

We live in worrying times. The climate crisis, stark inequalities, bloody conflicts and human rights abuses, and the personal and economic devastation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have put our world under greater stress than it has faced in my lifetime.

But the existential threat that cast a shadow over the first half of my life no longer receives the attention it should. Nuclear weapons have faded from headlines and Hollywood scripts. But the danger they pose remains as high as ever, and is growing by the year. Nuclear annihilation is just one misunderstanding or miscalculation away – a sword of Damocles that threatens not only suffering and death on a horrific scale, but the end of all life on earth.

Through a combination of luck and judgement, nuclear weapons have not been used since they incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. But with more than 13,000 nuclear weapons held in arsenals around the world, how long can our luck hold? The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a new awareness of the catastrophic impact of a low-probability event.

Following the end of the Cold War, nuclear arsenals were dramatically reduced and even eliminated. Entire regions declared themselves nuclear-weapons free zones. A deep and widespread repudiation of nuclear testing took hold. As Prime Minister of my country, I ordered Portugal to vote for the first time against the resumption of nuclear testing in the Pacific.

But the end of the Cold War also left us with a dangerous falsehood: that the threat of nuclear war was a thing of the past.

Nothing could be more mistaken. These weapons are not yesterday's problem. They remain today's growing threat.

The risk that nuclear weapons will be used is higher now than at any point since the duck-and-cover drills and fallout shelters of the Cold War.

Relationships between some countries that possess nuclear weapons are defined today by distrust and competition. Dialogue is largely absent. Transparency is waning and nuclear weapons are assuming greater importance as national security strategies find new contexts for their use.

Meanwhile, technological advances and the emergence of new arenas of competition in cyber space and outer space have exposed vulnerabilities and increased the risk of nuclear escalation. We lack international frameworks and tools that can deal with these developments. And today's multipolar global order means that regional crises with nuclear overtones threaten to draw in other nuclear-armed countries.

The nuclear landscape is a tinderbox. One accident or miscalculation could set it alight.

Our main hope to reverse course and steer our world away from nuclear cataclysm is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons – better known as the NPT – which dates from the height of the Cold War in 1970.

The NPT is one of the main reasons why nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945. It contains legally binding commitments to achieve nuclear disarmament, including by the five largest nuclear-armed countries. It is also a catalyst for disarmament – the only way to eliminate these horrendous weapons once and for all.

The 191 countries that have joined the NPT – representing the vast majority of the world – have pledged not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons. And these pledges are policed and enforced by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

One month from now, the countries that are members of the NPT will meet for their regular five-yearly conference to look at the Treaty's progress.

Another United Nations conference for a treaty with an acronym may not seem particularly newsworthy. But the NPT is critical to the security and prosperity of all people on earth.

We must seize the opportunity of January's NPT Review Conference to reverse dangerous and growing trends and escape the long shadow cast by these inhumane weapons.

The review conference must take bold action on six fronts: 1) Chart a path forward on nuclear disarmament. 2) Agree new measures of transparency and dialogue, to reduce the risk of nuclear war. 3) Address simmering nuclear crises in the Middle East and Asia. 4) Work to strengthen the global frameworks that support non-proliferation, including the IAEA. 5) Promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology for medical and other uses – one reason why the NPT has won the adherence of non-nuclear-weapons states. 6) Remind the world's people – especially its young people – that eliminating nuclear weapons is the only way to guarantee they will never be used.

I urge governments to approach the conference in a spirit of solidarity, frank dialogue, and flexibility.

What happens in the NPT negotiating rooms in January matters to everyone – because any use of nuclear weapons will affect everyone.

The fragility of our world has never been clearer.

I hope people everywhere will push governments to step back from the abyss and create a safer, more secure world for all: a world free of nuclear weapons.

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China's Foreign Policy Review 2021: An Expert Opinion By Dr Mehmood-ul-Hassan Khan

THE People's Republic of China outperformed the West and especially the US in many fronts of engagements, conflicts resolution, peaceful persuasions of soft image projection and last but not the least cultural diplomacy in which its dynamic foreign ministry played very important role to mitigate false and fake propaganda of the US and its regional allies as well as international supporters. Foreign Ministry of China constantly defused unjust escalations of the US and the West alike through logic, wisdom and rational dissemination of facts. It successfully mitigated the Western paramount hoopla against its mega project of One Belt One Road Initiative (BRI) and even outclassed in case of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

It successfully countered corporate, technology, economic and social sanctions scenarios through pragmatic media projections. It even succeeded to disdain the West and the US on the issue of origin of COVID-19 virus, Beijing Winter Olympics boycott, Hong Kong democracy, Taiwan succession, Lithuania provocations, South China Sea demography, and last but not the least minorities issues. In addition to this it discredited the Western whoopla against so-called superiority of their democratic norms and rightly projected the unlimited blessings and socio-economic dividends of its socialist economy and people's friendly governance.

Most recently, while delivering a keynote speech during the opening ceremony of a Beijing-based annual symposium on international relations, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi rigorously reviewed China's diplomacy in 2021, and strongly defended China's principled stance on various issues and termed it right side of history. Wang Yi shared that year 2021 opened a new window of opportunities which changed global crises into opportunities and steadfastly forged ahead through struggle as well as cooperation. The Chinese Foreign Minister appreciated President Xi Jinping diversified but integrated diplomatic efforts in terms of building a community with a shared future for mankind, leading role of the Chinese people and the CPC with remarkable

feature to adapt to changes properly and keep breaking new ground. He showcased Chinese policy essence consisting of serve national rejuvenation amidst a complex situation and advance peaceful development in a fast-changing world.

Wang highlighted holistic anti-COVID policies of China during the pandemic which fulfilled the responsibility of a major country. He urged the international community to enhance cooperation against the pandemic. In this regard, China has set a good example of COVID response through a “dynamic zero-COVID” strategy as well as a good example of solidarity against the pandemic through greater international cooperation. With concrete actions, we have spearheaded the path to emerging from the darkest hour of the pandemic and kept moving forward, he added.

He termed current vaccine divide as the biggest impediment to ending the pandemic, with only five percent of the population in low-income countries fully vaccinated. In this connection, President Xi Jinping has pledged another one billion doses of vaccines to Africa, including 600 million doses as donation, to support the African Union’s goal of vaccinating 60 percent of the African population. It has injected new impetus into economic recovery and created new opportunities for common development.

Wang highlighted Chinese development-oriented solutions and dedicated efforts toward more robust, green and balanced global development. President Xi Jinping has officially put forth a Global Development Initiative aimed at enhancing all people’s well-being and realizing all-round human development he added. The Chinese President prioritized the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and stressed the need to have cooperation on poverty reduction, food security, COVID response and vaccines, development financing, climate change, green development, industrialization, digital economy and connectivity.

While talking on China’s macro-economy, he shared that his country strongly boosted the global economic recovery. China has been actively participating in the World Trade Organization, the Boao Forum for Asia, the World Economic Forum in Davos, the China International Fair for Trade in Services and the China International Import Expo (CIIE) during which President Xi announced a series of new measures such as a shorter negative list, a more business-friendly environment and greater institutional opening-up, to open wider to the world and

share China's development opportunities with other countries thus China remained hope of the last resort for regional socio-economic integration and global recovery. On the other hand, world has been divided and swinging between true and false multilateralism, however, China held high the torch of true multilateralism, and firmly upheld the authority of the UN and a stable international order and thus instrumental to discourage unilateralism.

China and the United States have explored a new mode of interaction based on mutual respect and equality. Since the beginning of this year, President Xi Jinping has had two requested telephone conversations with President Joe Biden, and the two presidents also held their first virtual meeting recently. President Xi Jinping gave comprehensive exposition of China's principled position on China-US relations. China and the European Union have overcome challenges and made new progress in their comprehensive strategic partnership. President Xi Jinping has attended two video summits with French and German leaders. A China-CEEC Summit has been held successfully via video link. The China-EU agreement on geographical indications has come into force. President Xi Jinping highlighted the spirit of China-Africa friendship and cooperation, spelt out four proposals for building a China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era, and announced nine programs for cooperation with Africa.

Moreover, the strategic partnership between China and Arab states has scaled a new height. China has maintained close communication with Arab states at the leaders' level, and had interactions with the entire Arab world at the foreign-minister level. In this connection, China has proposed a five-point initiative on achieving security and stability in the Middle East, a four-point proposal for the political settlement of the Syrian issue, and a three-point vision for the implementation of the two-state solution, contributing positive energy to peace and stability in the Middle East. To conclude, China tried to stop the Cold War mentality, provoking division, confrontation and creating blocs and advocated solidarity and cooperation for the common well-being of mankind, win-win cooperation, equality and respect.

Despite constant indoctrination of the US and the West, China stood on the right side of history and worked for human progress, international equity and justice and promoted befitting proposition for all the developing countries. Moreover, China choose cooperation over confrontation, coordination over contradiction, collaboration over conspiracy, openness over isolation, mutual benefit over zero-

sum game and equality over power politics and bullying. China has selected the path of peaceful co-existence, concept of shared prosperity, socio-economic prosperity, socio-economic integration and greater regional connectivity.

This scribe highly appreciates China's leading role in fighting COVID-19, fragile economic recovery, promoting multilateralism, multiculturalism, equitable international order, accountable global governance system, nurturing and supporting of South-South cooperation and safeguarding regional peace and stability. This scribe suggests that China should take all possible measures to ensure success of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, initiation of positive, productive and participatory steps to tackle challenges in the post-COVID era, implementation of the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and expansion of deepened global partnership in the days to come.

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The Real Crisis of Global Order By

Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 sparked a major debate over the nature and fate of the liberal international order, suddenly caught, it seemed, between the Charybdis of illiberal great-power challengers and the Scylla of a hostile U.S. president. Trump may have lost the presidency in 2020, but the liberal order remains under threat. If anything, recent events have underlined the magnitude of the challenges it faces—and, most important, that these challenges are only one manifestation of a much broader crisis endangering liberalism itself.

For decades after World War II, the dominant factions in both the Democratic and the Republican Parties were committed to the project of creating a U.S.-led liberal international order. They saw Washington as central to building a world at least partly organized around market exchanges and private property; the protection of political, civil, and human rights; the normative superiority of representative democracy; and formally equal sovereign states often working through multilateral institutions. Whatever its faults, the order that would emerge in the wake of the Cold War lifted millions out of poverty and led to a record percentage of humanity living under democratic governments. But it also removed firebreaks that made it more difficult for turmoil at one political level to spread to another—by, for instance, jumping from the subnational to the national to the regional and, finally, to the global level.

Key players in the established democracies, especially in Europe and North America, assumed that reducing international barriers would facilitate the spread of liberal movements and values. It did for a time, but the resulting international order now favors a diverse array of illiberal forces, including authoritarian states, such as China, that reject liberal democracy wholesale, as well as reactionary populists and conservative authoritarians who position themselves as protectors of so-called traditional values and national culture as they gradually subvert democratic institutions and the rule of law. In the eyes of many right-wing Americans and their overseas counterparts, Western illiberalism looks perfectly democratic.

Soon after his inauguration, U.S. President Joe Biden began talking about “a battle between the utility of democracies in the twenty-first century and autocracies.” In doing so, he echoed a widespread view that democratic liberalism faces threats from both within and without. Authoritarian powers and illiberal democracies are seeking to undermine key aspects of the liberal international order. And the supposed pillars of that order, most notably the United States, are in danger of succumbing to illiberalism at home.

Whether they want to “build back better” or “make America great again,” every American analyst seems to agree that the United States needs to first sort itself out to effectively compete with authoritarian great powers and advance the cause of democracy on the global stage. But the two major political parties have very different understandings of what this project of renewal entails. This schism is far greater than disputes over economic regulation and public investment. Partisans see the other side as an existential threat to the very survival of the United States as a democratic republic.

The United States is one of the more polarized Western democracies, but its political conflicts and tensions are manifestations of broader, international processes. The U.S. reactionary right, for example, is linked to a variety of global networks that include both opposition political movements and governing regimes. Efforts to shore up liberal democracy in the United States will have cascading and sometimes unpredictable effects on the broader liberal order; at the same time, policymakers cannot set the country’s affairs in order without tackling wider international and transnational challenges.

All of this goes way beyond giving American democracy a fresh coat of paint and remodeling its kitchen. The crisis cannot be addressed by simply recommitting the United States to multilateral institutions, treaties, and alliances. Its roots are structural. The nature of the contemporary liberal international order leaves democracies particularly vulnerable to both internal and external illiberal pressures.

In their current form, liberal institutions cannot stem the rising illiberal tide; governments have struggled to prevent the diffusion of antidemocratic ideologies and tactics, both homegrown and imported. Liberal democracies must adapt to fend off threats on multiple levels. But there is a catch. Any attempt to grapple

with this crisis will require policy decisions that are clearly illiberal or necessitate a new version of liberal order.

OPEN FOR INSTABILITY

Critics of the notion of a new cold war between China and the United States highlight fundamental differences between the world of today and that of the early decades of the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the United States formed the centers of discrete geopolitical blocs. By contrast, Beijing and Washington operate in overlapping and interconnected geopolitical spaces. For years, politicians in Washington have debated how many restrictions to place on Chinese investment in the United States. There was no such angst, and no need for it, when it came to the Soviet Union. U.S. companies did not outsource production to Soviet factories; the Soviet Union was never a significant supplier of finished goods to the United States or its key treaty allies.

A wide range of developments—all of which accelerated over the last three decades—have made the world denser with flows of knowledge and commerce, including the expansion of markets, economic deregulation, the easy mobility of capital, satellite communications, and digital media. People are more aware of what is happening in different parts of the world; formal and informal transnational political networks—limited during the Cold War by hard geopolitical borders and fewer, costlier forms of long-distance communication—have grown in both importance and reach.

These unfolding changes jumbled the geopolitical landscape that emerged after the implosion of the Soviet Union. No single, uniform international order replaced the more bifurcated international order of the Cold War; the world, despite the hopes of neoliberal politicians, never became “flat.” Instead, the international order that took shape by the turn of the century was highly variegated. Many of the new democratic regimes that appeared in the 1990s were only tenuously democratic; optimists wrongly dismissed early indications of weak liberal democratic institutions as but bumps on the road to full democratization. Eastward across Eurasia, liberal ordering became increasingly patchwork. Some states, such as China, managed to effectively access the benefits of the liberal economic order without accepting the requirements of political liberalism.

Liberal institutions cannot stem the rising illiberal tide.

Many analysts in those years promised that market expansion would produce robust middle classes that would in turn demand political liberalization. They argued that the development of a global civil society—underpinned by human rights, the rule of law, and environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—would help cultivate and mobilize pro-democracy forces, especially in the post-Soviet space. The Internet, widely imagined as an unstoppable force for freedom, would do its part to spread the irresistible appeal of both liberal economic principles and liberal political freedoms.

One could still make a case for optimism even after 2005, the last year that had a net increase in global democracy, according to the pro-democracy advocacy group Freedom House. But in retrospect, it seems hopelessly naive.

In 2001, only a few months before China formally entered the World Trade Organization, the September 11 attacks drove the United States to embark on the global war on terrorism. The Bush administration adopted or expanded a host of illiberal practices, including the torture of “unlawful combatants” through “enhanced interrogation” techniques and via “extraordinary renditions” to third-party governments, and embraced a militarized version of democracy promotion. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the accompanying doctrine of preemption further strained relations between the United States and European allies such as France and Germany. The upheavals of the “color revolutions”—liberal uprisings in post-Soviet countries (in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004)—and the Arab Spring, which flared in 2010, further underscored the threat posed by agents of the liberal order, such as international institutions, Western NGOs, and social media. Authoritarian and illiberal regimes increasingly pursued strategies to inoculate themselves from these transnational liberal threats.

The cumulative result of technological innovations, policy choices made by liberal powers, and evolving authoritarian practices was “asymmetric openness”—the strange reality that the contemporary liberal order works better for authoritarian regimes than it does for liberal democracies. Authoritarian states can curtail the effect on their populations of international civil society, multinational corporations, economic flows, and even the Internet much more effectively than can liberal democracies. Authoritarians can use the freedom of global flows—as afforded by liberal policies, whether economic or political—to advance their own illiberal influence. They do so while variously interdicting, excluding, and controlling

cross-national flows of ideas, organizations, information, and money that might threaten their hold on power.

THE AUTHORITARIAN ADVANTAGE

The openness of liberal countries—one of the core principles of such societies—has become a liability. A fundamental problem confronting U.S. policymakers—and one that is especially challenging to those whose assumptions were shaped by governing during the 1990s and early years of this century, when the United States exercised hegemony—is the adeptness with which illiberal states and political movements exploit an open and interconnected global system.

Openness is not producing a more liberal global media and information environment; authoritarians build barriers to Western media in their own countries while using access to Western platforms to advance their own agendas. For example, authoritarian states now enjoy expanded media access to the democratic world. State-run global media outlets, such as China's CGTN and Russia's RT, receive billions of dollars in government support and maintain a plethora of foreign bureaus and correspondents, including in Western democracies—even as authoritarian regimes increasingly exclude Western media. China expelled BBC correspondents and banned the British network from broadcasting in the country in 2021 for its coverage of abuses in Xinjiang.

Similarly, authoritarian-sponsored organizations and lobbying groups continue their activities within open societies even as countries such as China and Russia ban Western officials, academics, and think tankers. Contemporary autocrats are image conscious. They use new technologies and social media platforms to shape their global profiles and elevate their standing with both domestic and international audiences. They routinely contract the services of public relations firms in the West, which portray their clients as popular at home, emphasize their geostrategic importance, and whitewash histories of repression and corruption. Autocrats also attempt to influence policymakers in liberal democracies by funding think tanks and sponsoring “study tours” and other junkets. Reputation management firms—retained by illiberal governments and oligarchs from autocracies—carefully scan global media and threaten litigation to dissuade negative coverage and deter investigations.

Digital technologies enable new instruments of domestic and transnational repression. They have allowed the security services of both powerful countries

(such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) and weaker ones (such as Belarus, Rwanda, and Tajikistan) to intensify campaigns to monitor, intimidate, and silence political opponents in exile and activists in diaspora communities—even those residing in countries normally considered safe havens, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As a recent investigation into the Israeli technology company NSO Group and its Pegasus spyware highlighted, authoritarian governments engage in extensive digital surveillance of dissidents and journalists from other countries, often with the aid of corporations based in democratic states.

Western technology companies were once self-proclaimed champions of openness. Now, many are capitulating to pressures from their host countries to remove content and tools that could be used to facilitate mobilization against the regime. Just prior to the parliamentary elections in Russia in September 2021, the Kremlin convinced Apple and Google to remove an application developed by supporters of the jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny that was designed to help coordinate the opposition vote. Navalny accused the technology giants of acting as the Kremlin’s “accomplices.”

International institutions are also bending to the will of authoritarians. China under the leadership of President Xi Jinping has aggressively sought to curtail criticism of the country in UN human rights forums. According to the advocacy group Human Rights Watch, Beijing has sought to “neutralize the ability of that system to hold any government accountable for serious human rights violations.” Authoritarian states have banded together in coalitions such as the Like-Minded Group to oppose criticism of the human rights practices of individual countries, privilege state sovereignty, and block the accreditation of NGOs and diminish their role in authorized UN processes, such as the Universal Periodic Review. China now leads four UN agencies and has pushed for its preferred leadership candidates in others, including the World Health Organization. In September, the World Bank Group canceled its influential “Doing Business” annual study after an external investigative report found that its leaders, for political reasons, had applied “undue pressure” on their staff to improve China’s position in the 2018 ranking.

Not only can authoritarian states operate freely in the universalist institutions of the liberal international order, but they are also constructing an ecosystem of alternative ordering institutions from which they exclude or significantly curtail the

influence of liberal democracies. By founding new regional economic and security organizations, China and Russia can press home their regional agendas via institutions that openly reject the dissemination of political liberal norms and values, use those institutions to help organize illiberal blocs within more venerable international organizations, and maintain exit options should liberal ordering institutions become less welcoming to authoritarians.

THE ROT WITHIN

The threat to liberal democracies also comes from within. The liberal order is anchored by two large federations: the United States and the European Union. Both are also home to some of the most potent and potentially consequential forces of illiberalism. These assume, broadly speaking, two forms: the illiberal actions that liberal democratic governments themselves take in seeking to counter perceived threats and the antidemocratic forces seen in illiberal political movements, parties, and politicians.

Democratic governments have always grappled with tradeoffs between liberty and security, and liberalism has always faced dilemmas about how far to tolerate illiberal actors. The U.S. government condoned the subnational racial authoritarianism of Jim Crow and racial segregation for the majority of the twentieth century, with horrific consequences. U.S. national security policy after 9/11 contributed to the current crisis of the liberal order by, among other things, promulgating the doctrine of preemptive war and militarizing democracy promotion. The United States' embrace of speculative capitalism and its overly financed economy made it the epicenter of the 2008 financial crisis. Most recently, the global pandemic has normalized tighter border controls and more restrictive immigration policies and undermined the legitimacy of protections for refugees.

In order to push back against illiberal forces, most notably China, democratic governments have adopted policies that cut against the openness that characterizes the contemporary liberal order. Washington has used coercive instruments to intervene in global markets in an attempt to preserve U.S. access to and superiority in strategically important technologies. Security concerns related to the potential large-scale Chinese surveillance of Western telecommunications traffic, for example, led the Trump administration to place substantial pressure on its allies to reject Chinese 5G technology. Even many

U.S. politicians and foreign policy officials who are, unlike Trump, committed to market liberalism generally consider this policy a success.

Liberalism risks undermining itself.

Genuine support for broad-based economic decoupling from China remains limited, but the growing rivalry between Beijing and Washington has produced other, albeit partial, moves away from market liberalism in the name of competitiveness and strategic autonomy. Stuck in the reconciliation process at the time of this writing, the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act is the first significant bipartisan legislation in years to embrace national industrial policy. In this respect, it represents a very limited reversal of the open liberalism, or neoliberalism, of the post–Cold War period.

The neoliberal variant of market liberalism—the push, starting in the 1970s, toward ever-greater deregulation, privatization, and capital mobility—eroded social protections and increased inequality, including by dramatically refashioning the tax code to benefit high-income earners and U.S. corporations. But instead of reversing these policies, many U.S. politicians prefer to place the blame on Chinese trade practices. Maintaining tariffs on Chinese goods appeals to populist sentiments and benefits a limited number of workers in industries that compete against Chinese imports, such as steel. But the harm it inflicts on export industries and consumers is greater. So far, the tariffs do not seem to have produced a new, better trading arrangement with China.

Efforts to grapple with homegrown antidemocratic forces also threaten to undermine liberal norms and values. In the United States, liberals and progressives have called for changes in procedural rules to prevent democratic backsliding. They champion taking an aggressive stance against right-wing militias and paramilitary organizations, stacking the Supreme Court with liberal judges, and abandoning long-standing legislative practices, such as the filibuster. When overtly illiberal regimes take these same measures, observers rightly accuse them of undermining democracy.

The fact remains that liberal democracies do face very real threats from the rise of reactionary populism, conservative authoritarianism, and other antidemocratic movements. In the United States, one of the two major political parties remains beholden to an authoritarian demagogue. Motivated by the “Big Lie” (the objectively false claim that Democrats stole the election from Trump through

systematic voter fraud), the Republican Party is purging officials who stood in the way of efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. Republican voter-suppression efforts are accelerating. Extreme gerrymandering has already made some states—such as Maryland, North Carolina, and Wisconsin—de facto legislative anocracies, or systems of governance that mix democratic and autocratic features. If these trends continue, procedural changes may prove to be the only way to prevent the unraveling of democracy in the United States.

CULTURE WARS AND POWER POLITICS

More broadly, liberalism risks undermining itself. At the heart of contemporary political liberalism lies the belief that certain rights and values are universal—that they exist regardless of differences among countries, cultures, or historical backgrounds. The human rights treaty system embraces this understanding; signatory states commit to protecting specific rights, such as due process, and to refraining from particular violations of human rights, such as torture.

The expansion of liberal rights in recent decades, however, has fueled a growing backlash. The Obama administration's effort to promote LGBTQ rights abroad, usually through the State Department, sparked anger among conservatives in countries as different as the Czech Republic and Uganda. The sprawl of contemporary liberal values—from LGBTQ rights to gender equality to the rights of migrants—invites pushback in both democratic and nondemocratic states. It provides illiberal politicians with opportunities to isolate specific liberal values and use them as wedge issues against their opponents.

Moscow, perhaps inadvertently, succeeded in casting itself as a beacon of traditional values through a campaign to demonize LGBTQ rights as a stalking-horse for child sexual abuse. There is nothing particularly novel about this kind of strategy. What is notable is how it has become transnational and, in so doing, has served as a basis for illiberal policies in other countries. Such wedge strategies are also used to undermine support in the international community for reformers by tying them to illiberal values. For example, Amnesty International briefly revoked Navalny's "prisoner of conscience" status following a Kremlin-backed information campaign that highlighted xenophobic comments he had made in the past about Central Asian migrants.

The point is not that the United States should retreat from making LGBTQ rights part of its foreign policy or that Navalny's alarming views on Central Asian

migrants are of no consequence. It is that in advancing liberal rights, policymakers have to navigate significant tradeoffs, inconsistencies, and contention.

This extends beyond matters of democracy promotion and civil rights. The Biden administration has correctly declared corruption to be a national security risk. But anticorruption measures will inspire blowback that also poses a national security concern. Aggressive measures will threaten politically connected oligarchs in Europe and elsewhere. Corrupt autocrats are likely to see a number of anti-kleptocracy efforts, such as expanding diligence requirements for service providers and prohibiting foreign officials from accepting bribes, as a serious threat to their regimes and will rally their publics against these new forms of “domestic interference.” Important steps for conserving liberalism, even defensive ones, will generate pushback against the liberal order—and not just from overseas. Anticorruption measures threaten a wide range of U.S. politicians, businesspeople, and consultants. In recent years, and especially after the 2016 election, such measures have become another source of partisan polarization.

REACTIONARIES WITHOUT BORDERS

That polarization is not a discrete national phenomenon. U.S. reactionary populism is a specific manifestation of a global trend. The international popularity of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban among right-wing commentators, ethnonationalist leaders, and conservative celebrities (particularly American ones) highlights the transnational character of illiberal networks. Orban—whom the Biden administration noticeably did not invite to the planned Summit for Democracy in December—has emerged as a media darling of the American right: a head of state who denounces the power of the philanthropist George Soros, touts anti-immigration policies, and champions traditional values.

The Conservative Political Action Conference—a major forum of the American right—plans to hold its 2022 annual meeting in Hungary. The Fox News host Tucker Carlson—arguably the single most influential conservative media personality in the United States—spent a week in Hungary in the summer of 2021 to interview Orban, praise his government, and tell his audience that Hungary is a model democracy. Carlson echoed Orban’s vision of a world in deep cultural crisis, with the fate of Western civilization supposedly in the balance; that perceived peril is the glue that unites the transnational right.

The guardrails designed to ward off illiberalism have failed.

Orban consolidated power through tactics that were procedurally legal but, in substance, undercut the rule of law. He stacked the courts with partisans and pressured, captured, or shut down independent media. Orban's open assault on academic freedom—including banning gender studies and evicting the Central European University from Hungary—finds analogies in current right-wing efforts in Republican-controlled states to ban the teaching of critical race theory and target liberal and left-wing academics.

The guardrails designed to ward off illiberalism have failed. The political scientist R. Daniel Kelemen, for example, points to how the EU, a supposed paragon of liberal democratic norms, did essentially nothing to prevent authorities in Hungary and Poland from incrementally weakening their democracies. The European Parliament institutes regionwide party groupings that effectively shield anti-EU parties, such as Hungary's Fidesz and Poland's Law and Justice party, from sanction. The common European labor market allows political opponents and disgruntled citizens to leave by simply relocating to other European countries, weakening the battle against illiberal policies at home.

These dynamics are not, in fact, all that different from those at play in the U.S. federal system: the courts shield antidemocratic practices such as extreme gerrymandering and targeted voter suppression, and some Republican-controlled states have enacted laws designed to let legislatures intervene in local election oversight under the pretense of preventing fraud. Many of those Republican officials who have become alarmed at the party's sharp authoritarian turn have done little or nothing in response for fear of personal political repercussions or of damaging the party's electoral prospects.

The elevation of Orban by American right-wing intellectuals and television hosts is a high-profile illustration of how the dense interconnections that form the core of the liberal order can facilitate the rise of antidemocratic movements. Another is the membership of Eduardo Bolsonaro, one of the sons of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, in a nationalist group founded by the U.S. reactionary populist Steve Bannon. Dark money from the United States underwrites illiberal parties and movements abroad. At the same time, kleptocrats launder funds into U.S. bank accounts, real estate, and even politics. This stokes populism in the United States via its corrupting influence. Many oligarchs and kleptocrats see the

patrimonial governing style of reactionary populists such as Trump as supportive of their interests and so are happy to support them in any way they can. Russian financing, often funneled through Kremlin-affiliated oligarchs, subsidizes right-wing and culturally conservative organizations in Europe and North America with the aim of undermining the liberal order.

As fissures widen in many ostensibly liberal democracies, a U.S. foreign policy aimed at defending liberal democracy will require the Biden administration—or any future Democratic administration—to take sides in the domestic politics of allied, democratic, and semidemocratic countries. When the Obama administration tried this approach, its efforts were haphazard and ineffectual. The Biden administration has notably refrained, at least publicly, from leveraging Trump-era security commitments to Poland to pressure the ruling Law and Justice party on the country’s democratic backsliding.

The Trump administration, on the other hand, openly endorsed illiberal right-wing governments in Hungary and Poland; it is possible that Trump’s efforts to support Andrzej Duda in the 2020 Polish presidential election helped him eke out a win over the more liberal Rafal Trzaskowski, the mayor of Warsaw. Neither the Trump administration nor the Trump-appointed ambassador to Hungary pressed Orban to reverse his decision in 2018 to evict the Central European University—established with money from George Soros—despite the fact that the university represented the largest single U.S. investment in higher education in post–Cold War Europe.

There is no question that a U.S. president who more openly and substantively aligns with center-right, center-left, and liberal parties overseas will risk further politicizing American foreign relations—most notably with respect to the broad transatlantic agenda that still commands support from influential Republicans. But as is the case with many of the dilemmas created by rising illiberalism, trying to avoid further politicizing this or polarizing that means, in practice, handing a substantial advantage to illiberal forces.

ECHOES OF HISTORY

For many, this peculiar moment in the international order augurs the coming of a new cold war, driven by an intensifying rivalry between Beijing and Washington. But a better, albeit still strained, historical analogy can be found in the “Twenty Years’ Crisis”—the fraught period between World War I and World War II when

democracies faced multiple pressures, including the Great Depression, reactionary conservatism, revolutionary socialism, and growing international tensions.

Liberal democracies appeared rudderless, internally divided, and generally incapable of rising to the challenge. They struggled to adapt to globalizing technological forces, including new means of mass communication that illiberal forces could use adroitly to their advantage. International migration stoked nativism. Illiberal policies and ideas were on the global offensive, spreading through old and new democracies alike. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw democratic powers—France, the United Kingdom, and the United States—do little to block the rise of fascism abroad or prevent the slide of fledgling democracies into conservative authoritarianism.

To defend liberal democracy, Washington will need to pick sides in the domestic politics of other countries.

The United States finds itself in a not entirely dissimilar position today. Republicans spent the 2020 presidential campaign calling the Democratic Party “communist” and associating their rivals with authoritarian capitalist China; right-wing media claim that Beijing is implicated in many of their favorite *bête noires*, including critical race theory. For their part, Democrats tied Republicans, and especially Trump, to the far-right ideology of white nationalism and invoked the specter of extremist militias and other domestic militant groups. U.S. policymakers struggle to pursue a coherent and effective foreign policy in defense of the liberal order for the simple reason that the American public is fundamentally divided.

This historical parallel even provides some limited grounds for optimism. The standard story holds that the vast spending program of the New Deal made liberal democracy attractive again; President Franklin Roosevelt transformed the United States into an “arsenal of democracy.” The United States, together with its allies, defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan on the land and the sea and in the skies. This comprehensive defeat, as well as the ample publicity given to the atrocities committed by the Axis powers, left fascism discredited and stigmatized.

Biden seems to favor this analogy. In his domestic policy, he has attempted his own version of the New Deal through a combination of several significant spending bills, including the American Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure Investment

and Jobs Act, and one other infrastructure bill—which was in limbo at the time of this writing. In his foreign policy, Biden wants to build a coalition of democracies under U.S. leadership to meet the challenge of rising illiberalism and especially to oppose Chinese and Russian efforts to reconstruct the international order along more autocratic lines. The White House hopes that the meeting of leaders in forums such as the Summit for Democracy will bolster this initiative.

ON WHOSE TERMS?

The odds, however, are not in the administration's favor. The United States remains the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, but China is challenging the United States' influence over the international order—and will continue to do so even if its dramatic rise tapers into stagnation. Washington is reaping the costs of two decades of failures in the Middle East and Central Asia. The United States burned through truly staggering sums of money in those failed overseas entanglements, ultimately purchasing the breakdown of U.S. hegemony in the Middle East and the total collapse of its nation-building project in Afghanistan.

But the domestic front should be even more worrisome for the United States. The two parties may muddle through and avoid tanking U.S. liberal democracy—no small achievement considering Republican actions in the wake of the 2020 presidential election. There remains, however, the overwhelming crush of intense political polarization, hyperpartisan scorched-earth tactics, and legislative gridlock. These ills have generated a host of further problems. Both U.S. allies and U.S. rivals are acutely aware that any agreement they make with the United States may not outlive the sitting administration. The U.S. Senate cannot ratify treaties for the foreseeable future, which limits Washington's ability to attempt significant reforms of the international order, including exercising consistent leadership on matters such as climate change.

After 30 years of worsening political polarization and dysfunction in the country, the U.S. foreign policy establishment has failed to reckon with this reality. Some acknowledge that promoting liberal democracy is now a less relevant priority than preventing democratic backsliding. But such policy debates still do not address the likelihood that the next administration will reverse any new policy, whether the consequences of such a reversal would be better or worse than never enacting a new policy in the first place, or how a new policy might be adjusted to make it harder to undo.

The United States cannot contemplate defeating its current authoritarian challengers in a total war.

Rather than openly confronting this reliability problem, foreign policy analysts float the idea, explicitly or implicitly, that a specific approach—to managing U.S. relations with China, for instance, or to international trade—will be the one that magically provides the basis for a new, bipartisan consensus. But this puts the cart before the horse. If Americans could forge a broadly shared understanding of international threats and an agreement about the purpose of U.S. foreign policy, then there wouldn't be a serious domestic political crisis to solve in the first place.

A daunting set of problems resides within the structure of the liberal order itself. The current arrangement is too rife with tensions, too internally fragmented, and too asymmetrically vulnerable. In order to survive, the liberal order will have to change.

U.S. officials who sincerely wish to defend the liberal order will need to choose sides, both domestically and in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. In doing so, they will blur the distinction between liberal and illiberal practices. They will need to break domestic norms, such as not modifying the size and jurisdiction of the federal judiciary because of its ideological disposition. They will also need to back away from post-Cold War norms, such as limiting favoritism toward political factions in and among major democratic allies. And they will need to do so with the clear understanding that these actions could backfire and provide rhetorical cover for illiberal and antidemocratic practices at home and abroad.

On the economic front, both Democrats and Republicans seem willing to sacrifice some amount of openness, but with very different ends in mind. Fortunately, most of the steps required to conserve the liberal order—such as clamping down on the flow of foreign kleptocratic money into the United States—would deal significant blows to external illiberal forces, even if they're conceptualized as domestic policies.

Grappling with domestic illiberal threats remains a thorny exercise. Of course, the defense of liberal democracy has produced terrible excesses in the past, including ugly repression and horrific violence. U.S. officials adopted decidedly

illiberal policies during the Red Scare that followed World War I, when the specter of Bolshevism loomed large. In trying to stem the rising right-wing extremist tide today, the United States risks returning to those dark times. But the alternative of inaction—Western liberalism’s failure to beat back fascism in the 1930s—remains a dangerous prospect.

History is an imperfect guide. Fascism was defeated—at least for a time—on the battlefields of World War II. Had Hitler been less interested in military conquest, fascist states might be a perfectly normal part of the current global landscape. The Soviet Union, for its part, collapsed because of a combination of the inefficiencies of its command economy, nationalist pressures, and policy choices that turned out very poorly.

The United States cannot really contemplate defeating its current authoritarian challengers in a total war, as that would likely produce a catastrophic nuclear exchange. Its most important authoritarian challenger, China, is a totally different kind of polity than the Soviet Union was. China is wealthy and relatively dynamic, and although it has its share of structural problems, it is not abundantly clear that its shortcomings are any worse than those of the United States.

In short, neither of the historical routes to the ideological victory of liberalism seems likely. This means that liberal democracies really do need to assume that they will not retake the catbird seat of the international order anytime soon. And so the question becomes not whether the liberal order will change but on whose terms.

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Will the World Recognise Taliban Rule? By

Kamran Yousaf

Last week, the UN Security Council passed a unanimous resolution allowing humanitarian aid and other assistance for the people of Afghanistan. The US-backed move was to find a way of reaching out to the people of Afghanistan without violating the UNSC sanctions regime against the Afghan Taliban. The resolution passed on Wednesday states that “payment of funds, other financial assets or economic resources, and the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of such assistance or to support such activities are permitted”. Such assistance supports “basic human needs in Afghanistan” and is “not a violation” of sanctions imposed on entities linked to the Taliban, it adds.

The US government separately also announced measures that would help address the liquidity crunch facing the Afghan private banks. The move came against the backdrop of desperate appeals by international aid agencies including the UN to prevent humanitarian catastrophe. Martin Griffiths, the UN relief chief, at a recently held extraordinary session of the OIC presented a grim picture of the Afghan situation. As per the details, nearly 23 million Afghans are facing food shortage, millions of children are at the risk of malnutrition and if urgent help is not reached 97 per cent of the Afghan population could slip below the poverty line by June next year.

Despite a whopping \$2.3 trillion spent by the US and its allies in the last 20 years, Afghanistan’s economy is on the verge of collapse. The US has withheld \$9.5 billion worth of Afghan central bank assets. The OIC foreign ministers in their joint declaration urged the US to unfreeze those assets but the US is reluctant to pay heed to such calls as one official claimed that the funds were frozen because of ongoing court proceedings back in the US.

Nevertheless, the latest UNSC resolution would give some relief to the people of Afghanistan. But Pakistan and other like-minded countries feel that providing aid to Afghan citizens may be a short-term measure and in the long run steps have to be taken to revive the Afghan economy. A senior Pakistani official dealing with Afghanistan told me recently that more than the food shortage it was the lack of

job opportunities and business activities that were causing problems to the people of Afghanistan. The official said with the exit of the US from Afghanistan, the entire financial and banking system there had collapsed.

But can the Afghan economy be revived without formally recognising the Taliban government? It is clear that without recognition such a revival is not possible. But the worry is that the Taliban government is not going to be recognised anytime soon. It is difficult because there is no consensus even within the OIC member states about the Taliban. It was because of this reason that during the recent OIC foreign ministers' meeting in Islamabad, Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Muttaqi was seated in the last row. He was not given the podium during the opening session though he was allowed to present his government's perspective during the closed-door session. He was not even invited for a group photo of the participating countries. "There is no appetite for the recognition of the Taliban government at this stage," admitted Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi after the daylong meeting of OIC foreign ministers.

According to officials, many OIC members were reluctant to legitimise Taliban rule because of the pressure from the US. Such was the pressure that even the Saudi Foreign Minister avoided a meeting with the Afghan acting foreign minister on the sidelines of the conference. Unless the US takes the first move, no other country including Pakistan would formally recognise the Taliban government. "It will be a long process. Even Pakistan is not going to recognise them soon. It's a difficult proposition," the official conceded.

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Global Trends: Possible Impact in 2022 By

Talat Masood

As the year 2021 comes to a close it is important to look at the major global and regional events and trends that will influence the politics and economy of the world and how these would affect our lives in the coming years.

Covid-19 will be a major challenge especially for Europe, Russia, Latin America and Africa. China, by adopting stern measures, is expected to keep its spread under control. Although Pakistan has been able to largely restrict its spread by the use of vaccines, the new strain of Omicron and resurgence remain a threat. The remarkable achievement in the field of medicine was the speed at which vaccines had been developed by major producers and distributed globally in less than a year.

The world is still adjusting to the adverse fallout of the pandemic on the global economy with strategic significance for the world order. The US and most countries suffered economic decline and are now striving to revive it, although the impact of the new variants on global health introduces another element of uncertainty. One country whose economy continues to fare well despite the pandemic is China. In 2020 and 2021 its economy grew by approximately 2.5%. This was no mean achievement and according to experts would hasten its march to be the world's largest economy by 2027. Economic success and political stability have given China the confidence to take measures to consolidate its internal power and extend its outer reach by being more geopolitically assertive. These tendencies were reflected in its supply of medicines and vaccines and its handling of the territorial dispute with India and in dealing with the integration of Hong Kong with the mainland. The US and Western countries are taking several economic and political measures to thwart China's rise that have implications for countries like Pakistan.

The spread of Covid-19 as a pandemic is a stark reminder that nations need to prepare themselves to deal with such extraordinary challenges. Unfortunately, instead of cooperating in fighting the pandemic at the global level and complementing each other's efforts, the US and China are competing strategically that could lead to dividing the world in different spheres of influence.

The alternate view is that in some ways competition brings in the best and allows less developed nations to benefit from both.

Major powers, by delivering vaccines and medicines to developing countries, have used the spread of pandemic to strategic advantage. Claiming superiority within the hierarchy of vaccines in terms of quality is another area of competition between major powers. The US and Western countries grade Chinese vaccines inferior in its effectiveness but irrespective of their claim the Chinese through better organisation and mass vaccinations have been the most successful in combating the pandemic.

To prevent the ill effects of climate change, China and the US ought to be cooperating closely, but on the contrary, the same instincts of competition govern their policies. The race for having monopoly on raw materials that are essential components for achieving a carbon-free economy such as batteries, magnets, etcetera has already started. The very concept of inter-dependence for promoting global economy has been replaced by severe competition and mutual sanctions. Countries of the developing world are under pressure for choosing one or the other major power which is reminiscent of the Cold War era. Many major polluters like Brazil and other Latin American, South Asian and African countries remain indifferent to this ominous challenge.

A comprehensive approach has to be adopted in dealing with traditional and non-traditional threats. Nonetheless, as indications are the Sino-US competition would intensify. Perhaps it would not be as serious and conflictual as the US-Soviet Cold War but still create sharp divisions within the international system and place countries like Pakistan in difficult position that aims at having a strategic partnership with China and good relations with the US. Some of the European countries like Germany and Italy, besides being part of the Western camp, would like to maintain mutually beneficial economic and commercial relations with China.

The outcome of the competition between China and the US will also depend on the stability and intrinsic strength of their political and economic systems. No doubt, China has made remarkable progress in promoting economic progress and political stability. It claims to have practically wiped out poverty which is an extraordinary achievement considering that their population of over a billion people. But will China be able to continue with its upward march in the face of the

hostile economic and political policies of the US? Is it that easy for the US to shift its economic focus away from China? Which alternate markets are available to it that have the capacity for mass production and at the same cost?

The progress in the scientific and technological field and the stability of the political systems will ultimately determine whether the US will continue to influence and dominate the world or in a decade or so China will be a serious rival.

Russia and China presently are focused on the stability of nations at the regional level. China's interest in the stability of Pakistan is for everyone to see. Along with Russia and Central Asian states, it is working towards promoting peace in Afghanistan. The spillover effect from an unstable Afghanistan seriously affects the security and economy of neighbouring countries. It is disconcerting the way the Taliban government is treating women and confirms that they haven't changed from their medieval thinking. Their policies could encourage retrogressive elements and groups within Pakistan and neighbouring countries. More so it would give the US and Western countries good reason to withhold aid and recognition at the official level.

No less important is the race to dominate the space. In this, the US and Russia will remain in the lead but China is expected to fast catch up. It is making progress with several space-related initiatives which the US and its allies find disconcerting. There are clear signs that space would be another area of competition between major powers.

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