

June 2021

# globalpoint

## Current Affairs

---

*Latest Current Affairs Articles from June 2021*

---

- *Pakistan (10 Articles)*
  - *World (12 Articles)*
  - *Economy (9 Articles)*
  - *Education (4 Articles)*
- 

*Compiled By Shahbaz Shakeel*

---

# DOWNLOAD

**CSS Notes, Books, MCQs, Magazines**



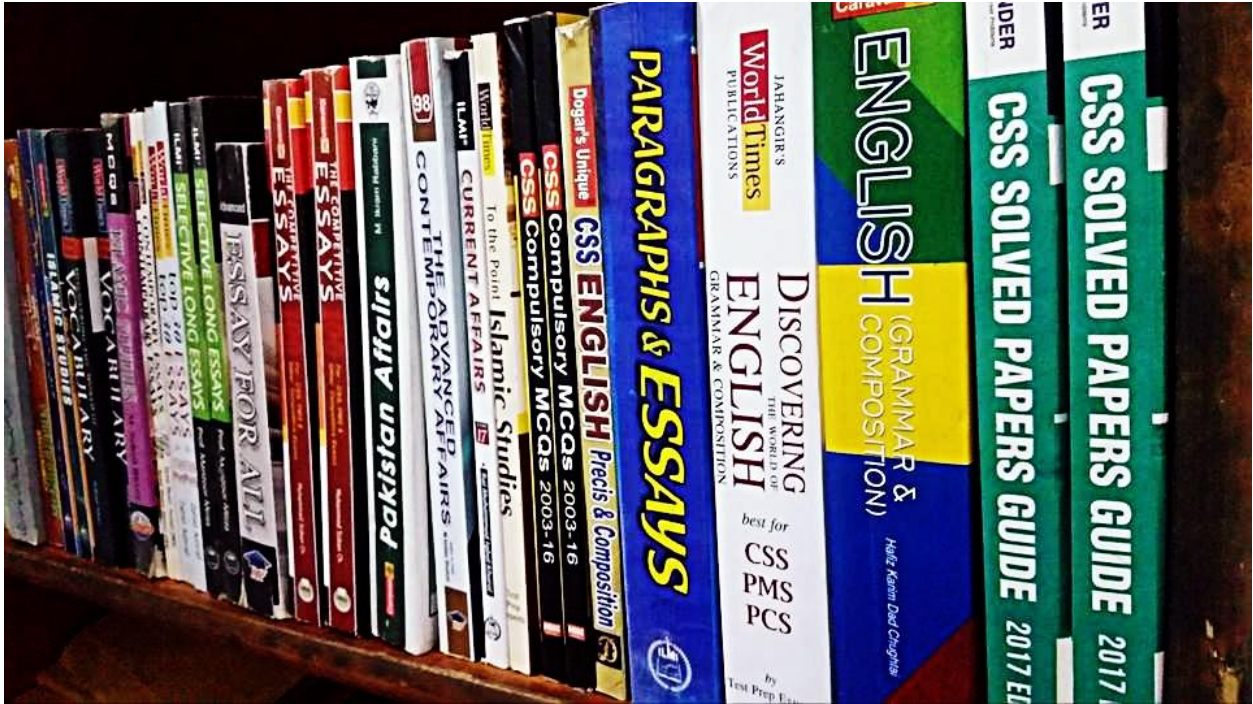
**THE CSS POINT**  
Yes We Can Do It!

**[WWW.THECSSPOINT.COM](http://WWW.THECSSPOINT.COM)**

- **Download CSS Notes**
- **Download CSS Books**
- **Download CSS Magazines**
- **Download CSS MCQs**
- **Download CSS Past Papers**

*The CSS Point, Pakistan's The Best  
Online FREE Web source for All CSS  
Aspirants.*

Email: [info@thecsspoint.com](mailto:info@thecsspoint.com)



BUY CSS / PMS / NTS & GENERAL KNOWLEDGE BOOKS  
ONLINE **CASH ON DELIVERY** ALL OVER PAKISTAN

Visit Now:

[WWW.CSSBOOKS.NET](http://WWW.CSSBOOKS.NET)

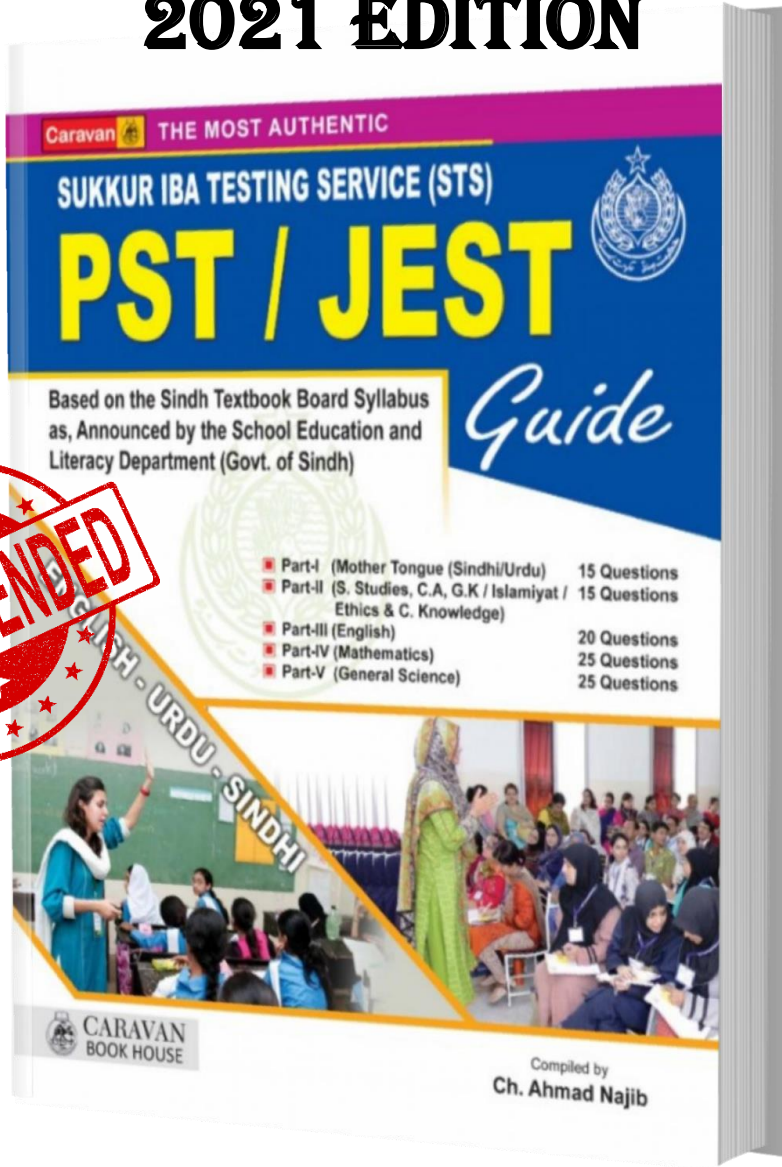
For Oder & Inquiry  
Call/SMS/WhatsApp

**0333 6042057 – 0726 540141**

**SUKKUR IBA TESTING SERVICE (STS)**

# **PST | JEST GUIDE BY CARAVAN**

**2021 EDITION**



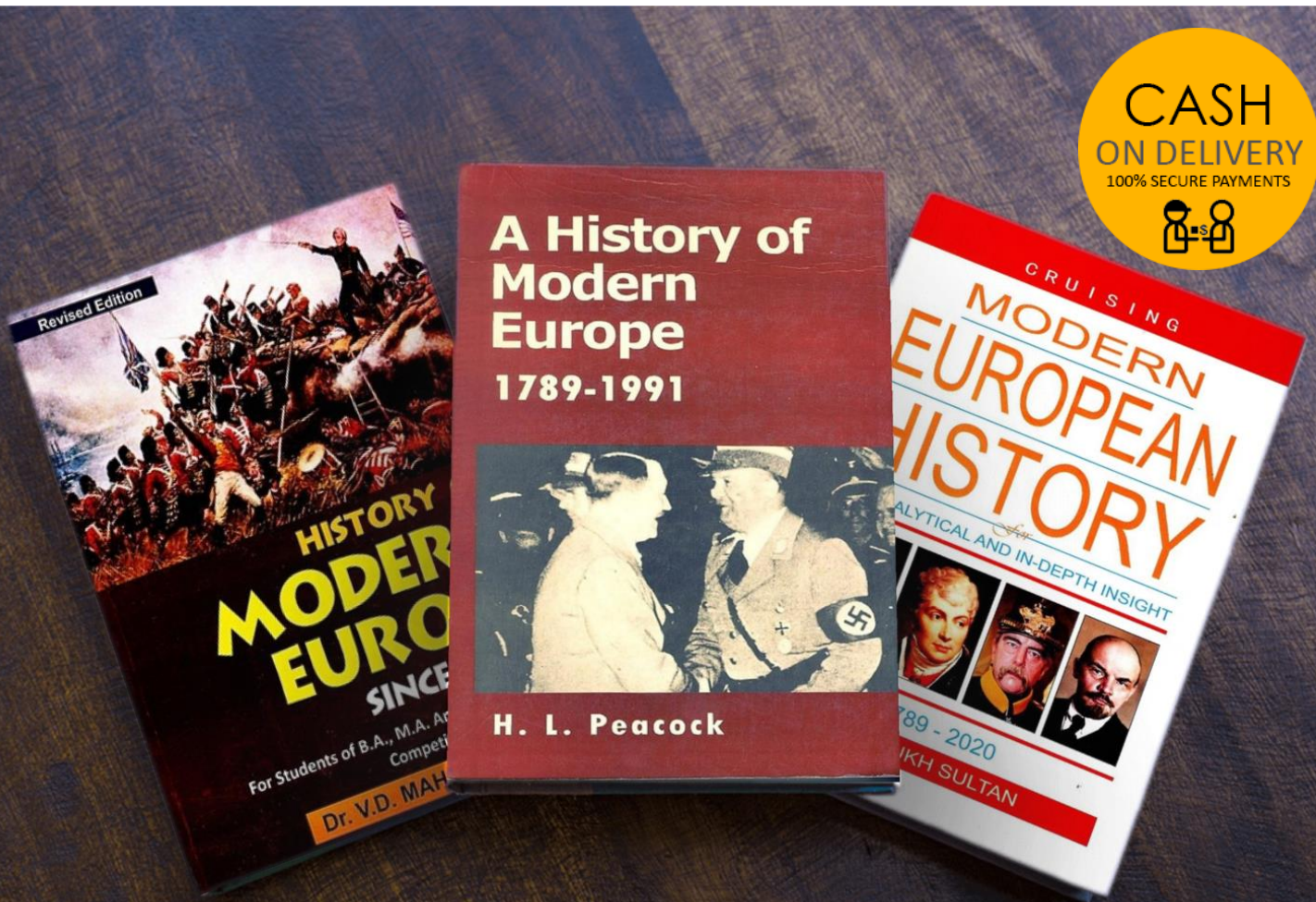
**ORDER NOW!**

**CALL/SMS 0726540141 - 03336042057**



# CSS / PMS

## EUROPEAN HISTORY BOOKS



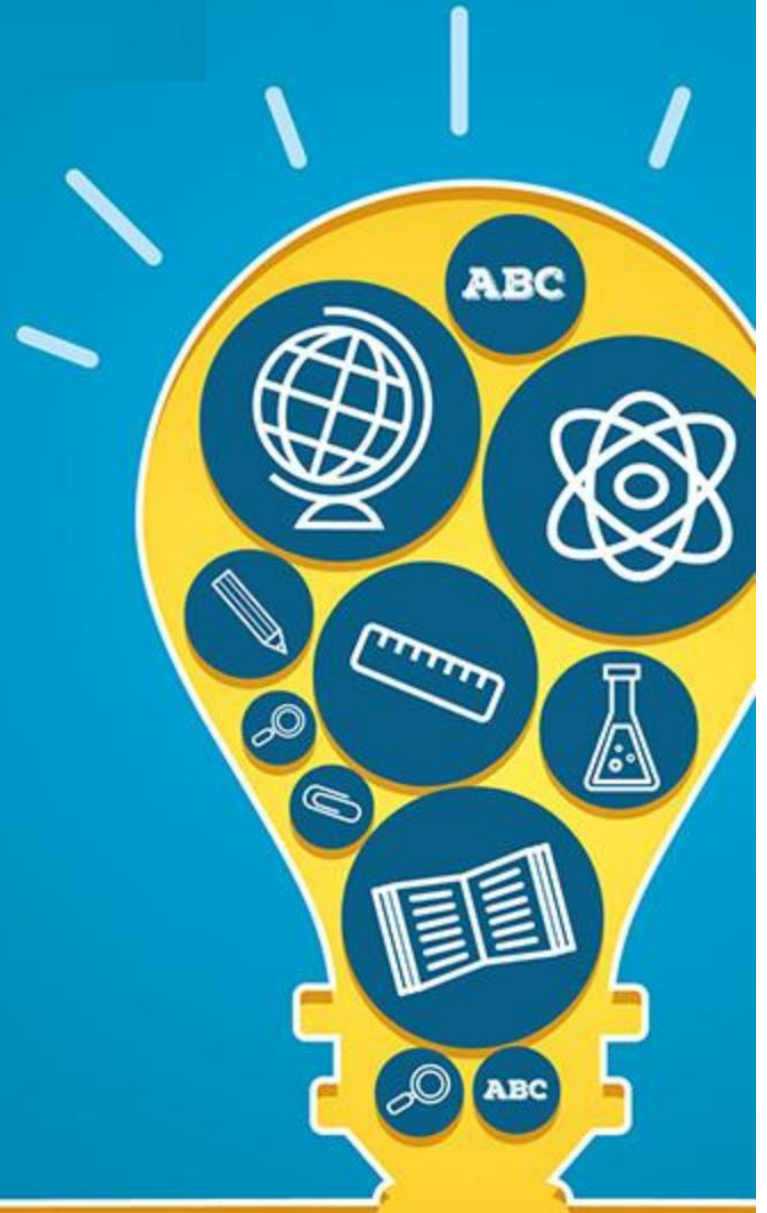
Call/SMS 03336042057 - 0726540141

[Order Now](#)



# BUY CSS PMS BOOKS ONLINE FREE DELIVERY ALL PAKISTAN

- FREE SHIPPING
- EASY PAYMENT
- FAST DELIVERY
- MAXIMUM DISCOUNTS



FOR ORDER PLEASE CALL / WHATSAPP

03336042057 - 0726540141

[www.booksbazar.net](http://www.booksbazar.net)





# Table of Contents

## **PAKISTAN**

1. A Critical Phase   Editorial .....	9
2. Cross-Border Attacks   Editorial .....	11
3. Pakistan and India Rapprochement By Zuhaib Anwar.....	13
4. National Drive Against Covid-19 By Kamal Siddiqi.....	16
5. Working Together   Editorial.....	18
6. Pak-China Ties   Editorial.....	19
7. Pakistan’s Long-Term Nuclear Energy Programme By Dr Syed Javaid Khurshid .....	21
8. Pak-Saudi Strategic Brotherhood Touching New Heights By Abdullah Khan .....	26
9. When Pakistan Emerged as a Responsible Nuclear State By Anaya Shahid .....	31
10. Population and Pakistan’s Development By Shahid Javed Burki .....	34

## **ECONOMY**

1. Budget 2021: A Tough Call   Editorial.....	37
2. Path of Growth   Editorial .....	39
3. CPEC & ASEAN BY Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan .....	41
4. Reducing Deficit   Editorial.....	46
5. Pak-Saudi Economic Ties and Vision 2030 By Shakeel Ahmad Ramay .....	47
6. Propelling Economic Change By Malik Muhammad Ashraf.....	51
7. Significant Growth   Editorial .....	54
8. Pakistan’s Growth Miracle By Hasaan Khawar .....	56
9. Rising Exports   Editorial.....	58

## **EDUCATION**

1. The Education Conundrum   Editorial.....	59
2. CSS 2020 Result: Less Than 2% Pass the Competitive Exam.....	60
3. Rescuing Education From the Pandemic By Areebah Shahid .....	61
4. Pandemic Education: Need For Investment By Asim Bashir Khan.....	63

## **WORLD**

1. Softened Saudi Tone   Editorial.....	66
2. Russia’s Expanding Footprint In The Middle East – OpEd By Talmiz Ahmad.....	68
3. A New Page in US History By Rashid A Mughal .....	71

4. Afghanistan’s Moment of Risk and Opportunity By Ashraf Ghani ..... 76

5. China and Russia’s Dangerous Convergence By Andrea Kendall-Taylor and David Shullman ..... 82

6. Riyadh-Tehran Thaw | Editorial ..... 88

7. Resuming Peace Talks | Editorial..... 90

8. China-Iran Strategic Deal: Where does India Stand? By Dost Muhammad Barrech ..... 91

9. What Future Holds For Palestinians? By Talat Masood..... 95

10. Afghanistan at Crossroads By Abdul Hadi Mayar ..... 98

11. Iran Back in the Game | Editorial..... 102

12. Nuclear Nightmare: American Must Avoid War with Russia at All Costs By Kyle Mizokami..... 104



# PAKISTAN

---

## **A Critical Phase | Editorial**

THE coming weeks are critical for Pakistan's Covid-19 response. With a national positivity ratio of 10pc and an average of over 150 daily deaths this week, the situation is as alarming as ever. According to NCOC chief Asad Umar, the number of critical-care Covid patients on oxygen reached 5,360 on Friday — a figure that is 57pc higher than last June's peak.

Though the federal minister tweeted that the government is working on building oxygen capacity, given the rate at which the virus is spreading it may not be enough. As the nightmare unfolds in India, the desperate search for oxygen appears to be a key feature in the heartbreaking pleas of citizens who turn to social media for help.

Even at Pakistan's current positivity rate, oxygen availability continues to be a major constraint. Any higher, and the country will be plunged into the hell that India is living through right now. Along with oxygen availability, trained doctors are a finite resource. If the hospital inflows of critical-care patients increases, hospital staff will be left to make the heartbreaking decision of who lives or dies — a reality we have seen in Italy at the start of the pandemic and now in India.

Given these realities, SOP compliance and prevention in the last two weeks of Ramazan are vital. The alternative will be the near total collapse of the country's healthcare infrastructure. The end of Ramazan usually sees huge crowds in indoor markets set up for Eid shopping. And on Eid, families make multiple visits in a day to relatives —largely indoors as temperatures are high. If Eid activity continues as per normal, the post-Eid period will be dark. Here, the government's efforts to enforce SOPs and send the right message are critical. Unfortunately, even public officials, such as the KP health minister, Taimur Jhagra, are seen violating restrictions. At a time when the provinces need clear leadership, such a message is devastating for the Covid-19 response.

Even if Pakistan emerges from the third wave peak, the Covid-19 threat will not go away. With restrictions not enforced, compliance levels go down and the infection spreads with a vengeance. Pakistan has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the world — a tragedy given how much the healthcare system, economy and education have suffered in the pandemic. Though the government has now announced vaccinations for those who are 40 and above, the fact is that we have managed to vaccinate only 2m of our 220m population.

The government expects to get 15m new doses of the vaccine in the next two months, but it must have a better plan in case of delays. Till now, the vaccines being administered in the country are largely donations from other countries or private imports. The government must do more to strengthen its vaccine programme, or face the consequences of Covid waves every few months.

Published in Dawn, May 1st, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1621352/a-critical-phase> A Critical Phase | Editorial

## **Cross-Border Attacks | Editorial**

The past two days have only shown how peace in Afghanistan not only affects the region at large, but Pakistan specifically as well. The US first moved a bipartisan bill in its Senate, opening up export zones in both Afghanistan and Pakistan as a post-September plan to bring some much-needed growth and economic opportunity.

These Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) would allow for both Afghan and Pakistani citizens to use these points to export certain commodities to the US without any duties levied. If the list of products exempted is extensive enough to accommodate those in the area, this is a positive step for both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But questions of development aside, there is still the lingering security question that remains unaddressed. The attack on Friday that killed four Pakistani citizens in Afghanistan as a reminder of how all those in the region stand to benefit from peace in Afghanistan.

The four-member Extended Troika on Peaceful Settlement in Afghanistan—comprising Pakistan, China, Russia and the United States—have implored both the Afghan government and Taliban to curb cross-border attacks from Afghan soil. This statement in itself is a win for Pakistan, which has been raising this issue without much interest for a long time.

But the only way to truly stop these incidents to ensure Afghanistan itself is stable and peaceful. This extended troika has a job on its hands. September is quickly approaching and there is no indication of restarting the dialogue within Afghanistan. If a new set up is not in place before the withdrawal is complete, a bloody and violence civil war for supremacy among all factions is expected. This violence will naturally spillover into the region as well.

If however, the Taliban are brought to the negotiation table, the non-state actor and the existing government can work out a way with less bloodshed. The defence forces and the Taliban at least can find peace and can work together towards eliminating any other groups—such as the TTP—that pose a threat to

the region. There is little time left. The priority now is to finalise the process forward.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/02-May-2021/cross-border-attacks>



# **Pakistan and India Rapprochement By**

## **Zuhaib Anwar**

NEWS reports about backdoor contacts between Pakistan and India have recently emerged and the flexibility in statements by the government officials of the two states also suggest the same.

According to media, United Arab Emirates (UAE) is playing a leading role to bring the two nuclear-armed states- India and Pakistan to the negotiation table. The news was also confirmed by Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

However, the main power behind the curtain is believed to be the United States of America.

Prime Minister Imran Khan, at a recent rally in Kashmir said that “for the sake of peace in South Asia, we should build-up cordial relations and India should make a possible move by retracting her actions leading up to the revocation of Article 370/35A.”

Similarly, during the Islamabad Security Dialogue, Army Chief General Bajwa called for better Pakistan-India relations and said that both countries should “bury the past and move forward”.

Reciprocally, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent warm wishes to PM Imran Khan for his recovery from COVID-19. With this positivity in the air, hopes for better peace in the region have increased.

Kashmir is the most important issue between the two states but apart from that, there are multiple bilateral issues including Siachen, Indian violations of the Indus Waters Treaty, Sir Creek etc.

However, India has always in the past tried to steer the negotiations away from these core issues and rather focus on people-to-people contact, resumption of Afghan transit trade, bilateral trade or have made negotiations conditional to Pakistan’s compliance to Indian demands of addressing terrorism.

One of the possible reasons behind the current flexibility of the Modi-led BJP government in terms of negotiations is to regain the soft image of India that has been jeopardized by its regional aggressive policies, particularly towards Pakistan and the people of Kashmir.

The abrogation of Article 370 and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 have unveiled the true face of Indian leadership.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Imran Khan's efforts to highlight Indian atrocities in Kashmir and for the right of self-determination of the people of IIOJ&K at the regional and global level have further struck a blow to the soft image of India and shown its cruel ugly face to the world community.

The second possible reason can be attributed to the change in United States' administration. The new Biden administration does not want any kind of Pakistan-India hostility.

This is because US considers India as a key player in its "Indo-Pacific" strategy that focuses on the containment of China and reducing its influence in the region.

Moreover, the US believes that the two-front confrontation strategy of India would be badly damaging for the country or can even lead to its dismemberment as it does not possess the power and capability to conduct a two-front war.

Considering these ground realities, the United States is also pressurising India to reduce tension with Pakistan and focus on China.

For the above stated reasons, India is under pressure both domestically and internationally to revisit her approach towards Pakistan and to halt human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Indians would use these negotiations as a card to derail the negotiation process by taking up issues of least importance, diverting attention from the key ones and convincing the international community that they were committed to the process.

Therefore, Pakistan at this stage should take the lead by raising core issues on the negotiation table and remaining firm on them. Furthermore, the prime focus should remain on Kashmir.

If this does not happen, then it will alienate the Kashmiri people by making them think that Kashmir is of secondary importance for Pakistan.

Besides, other important issues like water, Siachen, and Sir Creek should be resolved and issues like Afghan transit trade, bilateral trade, and people-to-people can be discussed as additional points.

In order to achieve peace in South Asia, it is important that there is peace between these two countries.

Pakistan-India relations are complex and there are long-standing issues between the two that need to be resolved in order to normalise ties.

However, Pakistan should be cautious this time as the results of all past engagements suggest that India has always tried to hijack the negotiations and blamed Pakistan for their failure on one pretext or another.

Pakistan needs to play the cards right and must not let this chapter turn into another diplomatic stunt by India for regional and international marketing.

—The author is a researcher at the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS).

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pakistan-and-india-rapprochement-by-zuhaib-anwar/>

# **National Drive Against Covid-19 By Kamal Siddiqi**

Despite the scary rise in the number of deaths in Pakistan from Covid in the third wave, the general public is still not willing to take the pandemic seriously. Granted that Prime Minister Imran Khan had deputed the army to play a part in making people abide by SOPs, there is so much that the army or any other government institution can do. People are generally simply not interested in following the SOPs. Some feel that these SOPs are useless, other insist that the whole corona pandemic is an international conspiracy. A large number don't care either way — for them it is matter of faith and destiny.

The government, too, seems to have taken things easy this time round. In the first wave, the lockdown imposed were much more effective and taken seriously. A year on, most people feel that the lockdown is a joke. One doesn't have to go far to see how people are behaving. Observe any market area of any major city in Pakistan. Barely five per cent of the people will be wearing a mask, of which many will be wearing it incorrectly. The only people seen wearing their masks diligently seem to be policemen. It doesn't stop there. Most mosques do not observe SOPs either. Parties and get-togethers continue to take place without SOPs. In Ramazan we saw so many iftars. Now we are seeing hundreds of Eid Milan parties.

It is exactly this non-serious attitude that leads to spikes in Covid cases. Maybe it is time to set some ground rules, which we have been avoiding till now. The government can start by making use of mask compulsory in public areas. Those who violate the order could be made an example of.

The second step would be to make vaccination compulsory within a stipulated timeframe. So far, both the provincial and the federal government have done a good job of setting up vaccination centres and providing vaccines through a clear and transparent system. This should be used to our advantage. The Expo Centre in Karachi has a capacity of delivering 25,000 vaccines a day. Other centres need to also increase their capacity to deliver.



But it should not stop there. The government should also now start taking the vaccine to the people. When it comes to rural areas and also where elderly people are concerned, the government should go out in the field and vaccinate. It is important that those who cannot make it to the centres are not left out. Probably given their condition, they may need it the most.

But all these efforts may not succeed if a solid communications strategy is not put in place. People have to be told to get vaccinated. The dangers of not having a vaccine must be highlighted. They must be reminded of this on a daily basis. Many need to wake up from their slumber.

We are seeing that some people are not convinced with the efficacy of the vaccine. They are also afraid of the side-effects. Such fears have been played up in social media, by some members of our clergy and some opinion leaders as well as by ill-informed medical practitioners. The same ill-informed quarters (possibly at the behest of someone else) who have misguided thousands over the polio vaccine are now playing on the fears of the public with regards the Covid vaccine. These purveyors of death need to be identified and taken to task. They are playing with the lives of millions with their misguided beliefs.

A media campaign should also look at properly educating those who will take the message ahead. Not only members of the mainstream media, but opinion leaders, bloggers, citizen journalists and social media influencers. They need to be given a thorough briefing on what to say and what to debunk when talking about Covid given the level of misinformation and fake news that is circulating. The level of ignorance and misinformation is mind boggling. Social media and messaging platforms have made it worse.

We need to get serious about spreading the message. The message has to be clear and concise. Right now, it is confusing to most. It is important that we move swiftly on this as we will be able to save lives. We also need to ensure that Pakistan does not follow the path it has done with regard to polio. We cannot afford to be an international pariah state.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 17th, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2300112/national-drive-against-covid-19>

## **Working Together | Editorial**

Pakistan's Foreign Minister (FM) Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while addressing the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate presented Pakistan's desire to seek better relations with the United States.

Islamabad's wish to cultivate strong ties with the US is evident from the invitation of US lawmakers to visit Pakistan to hold consultations on enhancing the bilateral terms further. Undoubtedly, such engagements coupled with the US encouragement of regional trade and development would help both sides to protect mutual interests in the region and beyond.

One positive development recently observed was the consensus in the US congress over engagement with Pakistan, as the Congress was deliberating over the claim of the Afghan President that peace in Afghanistan was contingent upon "getting Pakistan on board."

Nevertheless, America's chief negotiator on Afghan affairs, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad supported Pakistan, as he informed the US lawmakers that the Afghans should not be absolved of their responsibilities. Deep factionalism, infighting and the Afghan government's inability to offer a lucrative deal to the Taliban to bring them to the negotiation table are amongst the most pressing issues plaguing the prospects of a stable and peaceful political future for the Afghan people.

What remains is the US government's recognition of Pakistan's efforts in convincing the Taliban to give peace a chance. As a peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan has yet to be achieved, the US Congress seems interested in maintaining ties with Islamabad.

Pakistan has always been open to all kinds of cooperation. But the US also has to initiate some moves on its own to ensure that the two sides remain close. Nonetheless, the possibility of cooperation between Islamabad and Washington depends heavily on what happens in Afghanistan. Pakistan needs to carry on with its efforts regarding peace in Afghanistan—which the world is recognising now—so that no one can blame Islamabad for personal failures.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/24-May-2021/working-together>

## **Pak-China Ties | Editorial**

China being a large and populous neighbouring country, its importance was realized by Founding Father Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Weeks before the creation of Pakistan the Quaid directed his office to initiate correspondence for the exchange of ambassadors with the Republic of China. It was announced on August 15 1947 that both sides had agreed to establish diplomatic relations.

Three years later Pakistan recognized the People's Republic of China soon after the revolution led by Mao Zedong. Despite Pakistan's increasing cooperation with the USA, relations with China remained amicable. China recognized that the newly created Pakistan was facing pressure from India and needed American weapons. Pakistan ensured that its membership of the US-led military pacts did not affect its ties with China. Despite close relations with India at the time China didn't side with New Delhi against Pakistan. The 1955 Bandung Conference brought together Prime Minister Bogra and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. By now India's hegemonic tendencies were becoming clear.

– Advertisement –

Zhou's visit to Pakistan in 1956 led to further development of bilateral understanding. In 1962 Pakistan and China signed the boundary agreement which precluded any controversy between the two countries. Throughout the early 1960s Washington concentrated on isolating China while pulling India into its orbit. Despite attempts to bring Pakistan into line, Washington could not achieve the aim. Pakistan-China relations continued to deepen despite changes of administrations. Among the factors that contributed to the strengthening of ties was China's implicit respect for Pakistan's sovereignty. During the China-India war and after, Pakistan continued to enhance cooperation with China defying US pressures and sanctions.

In March 1965 President Ayub visited China. The joint communiqué issued at the end of the visit reaffirmed that the Kashmir dispute should be resolved in accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir as pledged to them by India and Pakistan. What endeared China to the common man in Pakistan was its moral and political support in the 1965 war with India.

The 70 years of Pak-China relations are marked by exemplary good neighborliness. For years PIA provided China an opening to the outside world and Pakistan played a key role in the Sino-US secret breakthrough in 1971. Among the outstanding monuments of Pak-China friendship is the Karakoram Highway (KKH) jointly built by the governments of Pakistan and China. The gigantic CPEC worth \$62 billion promises to be a gamechanger for Pakistan.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/05/22/pak-china-ties/>



# **Pakistan's Long-Term Nuclear Energy Programme By Dr Syed Javaid Khurshid**

ENERGY plays a vital role in the development of a country. A country's progress is also estimated by its energy demand and consumption. At present Pakistan has an installed generation capacity of about 37,500MW.

The minimum total demand at present is about 24,000MW whereas the maximum total demand in summers is enhanced to nearly 29,000MW. The country's transmission and distribution capacity, however, is only approximately 22,000 MW.

This results in hours of electricity outages in the hot summer months. Besides that, over 50 million people are not connected to the national grid and don't have access to electricity.

An unrelated but major problem that has plagued Pakistan's power sector besides distribution capacity is the cost of electricity production.

Energy production in a country must be affordable, reliable and continuous and should be without emission of greenhouse gases to mitigate climate change.

There are many sources of producing energy. If we examine Pakistan's energy mix, we can have a clear idea of where the action is needed to obtain cheaper, continuous, and green energy.

At present, the energy mix of Pakistan is 64% Fossil (gas-38%, oil-16%, coal-10%), 26% hydropower, 6% nuclear, and 4% renewable (solar, wind). In Pakistan, fossil fuel consumption is disproportionally high.

Secondly, the use of imported gas and oil has enhanced the cost of electricity production manifolds.

Third, the cost of electric power generation plants operating on fossil fuels emits a lot of greenhouse gases.

It has also been realized by many international agencies such as International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Energy Agency (IEA) and Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) that the energy source of a country has to be reliable and continuous.

During the pandemic or any other similar situation, the uninterrupted supply of energy is also an essential factor for the security of a country.

The most important argument that supports this view is that those countries which have enough fuel for more than a year are in a better position to deal with the effects of a pandemic.

If a pandemic situation develops in the future, there can be a problem for countries like Pakistan with regard to import gas and oil for electricity generation.

Pakistan is importing about 42% of gas and oil for electricity generation and is dependent on foreign sources.

The logical solution for these problems is nuclear power. It has many advantages over other sources of energy.

It is a mature and reliable technology. It ensures a continuous supply of energy and also cost-effective besides having stringent safety standards and being environmentally friendly.

Over the years, large nuclear-fuelled power plants were installed in different countries but now many other feasible options of producing nuclear power such as Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and Mini Nuclear Reactors (MNRs) are being developed. These have many advantages over their larger predecessors.

They have a low initial cost, are factory produced, no refuelling is needed, and are easily transportable.

It is expected that the first commercial SMR is likely to start operating this year (2021) in a few developed countries that are developing this technology,

Nuclear power is one of the best and cleanest energy sources, produced by disintegrating atomic nuclei in a reactor in a controlled manner.

The first commercial nuclear power generation started in August 1956 at Calder Hall, United Kingdom by a 50MW reactor.

The Nuclear power generation picked up very quickly due to its advantages against all other forms of energy production.

If we compare it with other energy sources it has a clear advantage, such as 1 kg of Uranium-235 produces the energy equivalent to 3000 kg of coal and 1 kg of coal produces about 2.8 tons of carbon dioxide, it means that 1 kg of uranium saves the world from 8400 tons of carbon dioxide. Wind energy production uses a large area of land for installation.

It uses Sulphur hexafluoride gas for coating turbines, which stays for 1300 years in the atmosphere, Solar energy is a good renewable energy source but there is a disadvantage in manufacturing solar panels. They use heavy metals, hydrofluoric acid and nitrogen trifluoride.

The nitrogen trifluoride is 1700 times more toxic than carbon dioxide and stays for 100 years in the atmosphere.

Another problem is after completing their life span of 12-15 years solar panels need to be disposed of.

It is estimated that about 10,000 tons of solar panel waste by 2021, will grow to 800,000 tons by 2040.

As solar panels consist of heavy metals, their disposal will cause huge environmental problems.

Pakistan, a country with a population of 2.3 billion, has been striving for energy sufficiency since its inception.

The country needs a continuous increase in electricity production to meet the growing demand.

To meet the future projected demand of 42,000MW by 2025, mitigation of greenhouse gases and assured continuous and reliable supply, nuclear power generation seems to be the best available technology for the present.

Pakistani scientists are very experienced, highly skilled and have more than 50 years of safe running, handling and managing nuclear power plants and disposing of radioactive waste of nuclear reactors.

At present five Nuclear Power Reactors (NPRs) are working in Pakistan producing about 2335 MW of energy after including K-2 which has been officially inaugurated (21 May) on the occasion of 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China.

The other 2 NPRs K-3 and C-5 are in the different stages of construction, K-3 also of 1100 MW will start operating by the end of October 2021, whereas, 4 other NPRs are in different planning stages.

The nuclear power plants have proved that they are essential to maintain the energy supply and thus a very important pillar for the energy security of the country.

The greatest advantage of nuclear power plants is that they can provide an uninterrupted supply of electricity for more than a year.

With the advent of SMR technology, the running time will also increase and refuelling the SMRs every year would not be needed.

Pakistan has to achieve its targets of producing nuclear power of about 16% of the energy mix, which is 3,350MW by 2021, 8,800 MW by 2030, and 40,000 MW by 2048.

This nuclear power production plan is a part of the Energy Security Plan 2005 given by the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission and approved by the Government of Pakistan.

Pakistan is on course to achieving the targets set to obtain nuclear energy for the country. This will also go a long way ensuring Pakistan's long term energy program.



—The writer is senior Research Fellow, Centre of International Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pakistans-long-term-nuclear-energy-programme-by-dr-syed-javaid-khurshid/>

# **Pak-Saudi Strategic Brotherhood Touching New Heights By Abdullah Khan**

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are time-tested friends, strategic partners and brothers.

Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia cannot be compared with any other country.

Prime Minister Imran Khan and Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman are taking these relations to new heights.

The recent visit of PM Imran Khan on the special invitation of Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Prince Muhammad Bin Salman underscored the leadership role of the two countries in Muslim Ummah.

The joint statement issued after the meeting of the two leaders clearly shows that both the countries are not limiting their relationship to mutual benefits and bilateral affairs. Rather they are concerned about the problems of entire Muslim Ummah.

The joint statement mentioned Palestinian issue, Syrian civil war, Yemen and Houthi rebellion, Kashmir, Afghanistan and all other issues Muslim Ummah is facing.

Precisely, clauses from 6 to 11 of the joint statement are all about burning issues of Muslim Ummah.

They called for joint efforts by all Muslim countries against terrorism and extremism and to strive together to achieve international peace and security.

The two sides reaffirmed their full support for all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, especially, their right to self-determination and establishment of their independent state with pre-1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant UN resolutions.

They also expressed their support for political solutions in Syria and Libya, as well as the efforts of the UN and its envoys in this regard.

Pakistan lauded the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the resolution of the crisis in Yemen.

Both the leaders condemned attacks on Saudi Arabia by Houthi terrorists and other terror groups and urged to resolve the crisis according to Gulf Initiative and UN Security Council resolutions.

Pakistan's role in Afghan Peace Process was also praised by Crown Prince and the two leaders agreed to continue mutual consultations on the Afghan peace process.

Both the brotherly states almost always support each other on multilateral fora and they agreed to continue coordination and cooperation in future as well.

Saudi Arabia can play a role in removing Pakistan from the FATF list especially when Pakistan has done unprecedented progress against terror financing and money laundering.

As peace and stability in South Asia are linked with peace between India and Pakistan, no one can overlook the importance of the Kashmir dispute.

Both the leaders emphasized the importance of dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve the outstanding issues between the two countries, especially the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, to ensure peace and stability in the region.

Pakistan is at the juncture of South Asia and Central Asia as well as China. While Saudi Arabia is the pivot of the Middle East as well as it is a central sacred place for more than one and half billion Muslims across the globe.

Pakistan, the only Muslim nuclear and missile power and largest Muslim military while Saudi Arabia, custodian of the two Harmain, an economic giant, leader of OPEC and many economic forums are undoubtedly two major leaders of Muslim Ummah.

Blending their efforts together, they can lead Muslim Ummah towards a destiny where peace, security, stability and prosperity will prevail over extremism, terrorism, sectarianism, poverty, chaos and anarchy.

Recent rapprochement by Saudi Arabia towards Iran and resolving its issues with Qatar will pave way for a United Muslim Ummah.

Let us hope that Iran reciprocates the peace overture by Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman. Armed proxies in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria are the main bone of contention.

Normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran may help the region get rid of these militant proxies however it is easier said than done.

Pakistan can play a vital role in bringing the two rival states closer to sort out differences and bitterness.

Ultimately, Pakistan will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of peace between Saudi Arabia and Iran as our social fabric is marred with sectarian conflict emanating from rivalry between Arabia and Persia.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit was more focused on economic cooperation. The two sides discussed ways to strengthen and enhance economic and trade relations by exploring areas of investment and opportunities available in light of the Kingdom's 2030 vision and Pakistan's development priorities emanating from a shift from geopolitics to geo-economics.

The discussions also focused on increasing cooperation in other fields, including energy, science, technology, agriculture and culture.

In this regard, an agreement was also signed to establish Saudi-Pakistan Supreme Coordination Council (SPSCC).

Framework MoU was also signed between Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) and Pakistan for financing projects in Energy, Hydropower Generation, Infrastructure, Transport & Communication and Water Resource Development.

During his visit to Pakistan in 2019, Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman had pledged an investment of US\$ 20 billion in Pakistan including the Aramco Oil Refinery project in Gawadar.

A master plan for Pakistan's largest oil city, including a \$10 billion Aramco oil refinery project, is underway and expected to be ready before the end of the year according to Pakistani officials.

Pakistan-Saudi relations in the field of defence and security seems to be working at an optimum level.

The joint statement between the two leaders expressed 'satisfaction at existing cooperation in bilateral military and security relations, and agreed to further augment collaboration and cooperation to achieve mutually agreed goals.'

Threats to Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and territorial integrity are taken very seriously by Pakistan and it has always shown its firm commitment to defend Saudi Arabia against such threats.

Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa had reached days before Prime Minister Imran Khan and held meaningful talks with Saudi Leadership.

In his meeting with Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman and Deputy Defence Minister Prince Khalid Bin Salman General Qamar Javed Bajwa said that Pakistan is resolute in its commitment to safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of KSA and defence of the Two Holy Mosques.

It will be unjust if one does not acknowledge the efforts of the Saudi Ambassador in Pakistan Nawaf Bin Said Al-Malki who has been serving in the position since September 2017.

Before he was appointed Ambassador he was serving as Defence Attaché of the Kingdom to Pakistan since 2014.

Having vast experience and knowledge about the political, security and social dynamics of Pakistan and its core issues he is known as a pro-active diplomat.

It is a matter of fact that during his tenure Saudi outreach in Pakistan has considerably improved.

Meanwhile, Air Vice Marshal Awad Al Zahrani the Defence Attaché of Saudi Arabia in Pakistan has been playing an important role in augmenting already strong and unprecedented military ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Lt General Bilal Akbar, Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia was appointed at the position in January 2021 and he played a vital role in bringing the relations back to a normal level after some deterioration in 2020.

Pakistan's military relations and strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia is perhaps the main reason that currently Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan and Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia both are from military backgrounds.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to the Kingdom is expected to bring more colours to the already stronger and colourful relations especially in the sphere of economics and environment protection.

A new chapter is being written in the history and hopes are for the best for the people of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the rest of Muslim Ummah.

—The writer is Managing Director at an Islamabad-based think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pak-saudi-strategic-brotherhood-touching-new-heights-by-abdullah-khan/>



# **When Pakistan Emerged as a Responsible Nuclear State By Anaya Shahid**

28 May 1998 was the day when Pakistan became the seventh nuclear state and made its defence impregnable. Pakistan conducted a nuclear weapons test in response to India's nuclear tests conducted a few days earlier on 11 and 13 May, respectively. Since Independence, Pakistan has been neighbour to a hostile state, India, ruled by an extremist Hindutva ideology that has threatened Pakistan's sovereignty and existence. In 1948, India forcefully occupied Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagadh areas by massacring people who did not want to be annexed to India. These were just a few instances of India's aggression and intimidation.

Today's nuclear India is becoming a global migraine. It has the fastest-growing nuclear programme with multiple secret nuclear facilities to further expand its nuclear programme. India's offensive march on nuclearization and further expansion of its nuclear arsenal paints a grim situation for international arms control efforts

In 1998, India tested nuclear weapons while openly threatening Pakistan. Pakistan had no other option but to respond so that the level of deterrence could remain stable. Therefore, on 28 May 1998, Pakistan, as a direct response to Indian tests, also tested nuclear weapons to deter Indian aggression at all costs. Pakistan annually commemorates this day as the National Science Day and also as a reminder of the struggle and great odds it faced in order to defuse Indian threat.

"If India had not exploded the bomb, Pakistan would not have done so. Once New Delhi did so, we had no choice because of public pressure" – Former Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif.

India never thought that Pakistan could match India's nuclear capability in any manner. Therefore, the Indian leadership, soon after testing nuclear weapons, threatened Pakistan with nuclear attack and even some members of the ruling BJP warned Pakistan to leave Azad Kashmir. However, the Indian leadership's

threats met a firm response when Pakistan demonstrated its indigenous weapon capability.

Acquisition of nuclear deterrence capability was also necessary to project Pakistan's self-sufficiency in defense against any territorial threat. Pakistan's nuclear tests made it clear that when it comes to national honour and survival, Pakistan would maintain a balance of power against its adversaries. Indian acquisition of nuclear weapons compelled Pakistan to build its nuclear muscle for improving national security, otherwise it had no intention to do so.

It is an open secret that Pakistan did not introduce nuclear weapons in South Asia. In fact, India took the lead twice in bringing the nuclear dimension in the region. South Asian strategic dynamics were changed forever with the advent of nuclear weapons. Former Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani warned Pakistan that it should "realize the change in the geostrategic situation in the region and the world" and Pakistan must submit to Indian dictation, otherwise it "will be futile and costly for Pakistan." So, the Indian hostile hegemonic plan had to be neutralized by Pakistan. Since then, nuclear dissuasion has played a critical role in the political security and strategic stability of South Asia.

It is pertinent to note that Pakistan has always been hesitant to engage in the nuclear weapons race in South Asia.

Pakistan was aware of a nuclear arms race initiated by India. Therefore it, long before embarking on a nuclear journey, proposed to make South Asia a nuclear-free zone. India bluntly refused Pakistan's proposal. Pakistan on numerous occasions has bilaterally proposed India to limit the manufacturing or acquisition of nuclear weapons in order to strengthen arms control and disarmament in the region. India has, however always, declined to sign any disarmament or restraint agreement with Pakistan. India is to be rightly blamed for triggering a nuclear arms race in the region.

Today's nuclear India is becoming a global migraine. It has the fastest-growing nuclear programme with multiple secret nuclear facilities to further expand its nuclear programme. India's offensive march on nuclearization and further expansion of its nuclear arsenal paints a grim situation for international arms control efforts. Unlike India, Pakistan has no offensive strategic approach or aggressive hegemonic design, rather, its nuclear capability is purely defensive. A

nuclear-conscious Pakistan has a strong understanding of the sensitivities involved in military adventurism. Whereas India's prestige hunger drives its nuclear developments.

Youm-e-Takbeer has helped Pakistani leaders in making wise decisions to consistently support nuclear nonproliferation. Pakistani scientists and engineers have employed research and development of nuclear technology for peaceful uses. For instance, power generation, agriculture, medicine, and the environment. Pakistan believes in peaceful coexistence and as a responsible nuclear country, it has put in serious efforts to settle long-standing disputes. If the international community would force India to follow sui, South Asia could not go into nuclear brinkmanship

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/05/29/when-pakistan-emerged-as-a-responsible-nuclear-state/>

# **Population and Pakistan's Development By**

## **Shahid Javed Burki**

The world is going through a serious demographic change that was predicted but not to the extent it is actually happening. These changes will have a number of important consequences; some positive, the other negative. The world population is expected to increase from 7.8 billion in 2020 to 9.9 billion by 2050. The current global total fertility rate is 2.3 births per woman. However, 91 countries have registered fertility levels below 2.1 which is the population replacement level. This means that these countries have entered the phase of population decline. The United States, most of Europe, and China now have declining populations.

In late April, the American Census Bureau began to release basic information from the population count conducted in 2020. The numbers confirmed what demographers have been warning for years. The US along with China and most of the countries in Europe is undergoing “demographic stagnation”. These countries are transitioning from relatively fast-growing nations of young people to slow growing countries of older people. As Farhad Manjoo wrote in his column for The New York Times, “Demographic transition could bring its own costs, among them a steady reduction in dynamism, productivity and slowdown in national and individual prosperity.” For the US and China this transition could mean a diminishment of global power.

The United States Census Bureau predicts that sometime in the next decade, Americans over 65 will outnumber those younger than 18 for the first time in the country's history. America will cross the 400-million population mark sometime in late 20-50s. By that time about half of Americans will be over the age of 45 years, and one-fifth will be older than 85. An aging and declining population could be catastrophic for the countries that are heading towards that situation. In a recent paper, Chad Jones, an economist at Stanford University, argues that a global population decline could reduce the fundamental innovativeness of mankind. If increased births are not a feasible option, the only other way is to bring in more people from the outside. In a recent report authored by Ali Noorani, the chief executive of the National Immigration Forum, and his coauthor Danilo Zak suggest that increasing legal migration by slightly more than a third each year would keep America's ratio of working young people to old people stable over the

next half century. Those who should be brought in should come from the countries that have large surpluses of people to export and have the skills — or can be given the skills — that countries such as the US and China need. This is where Pakistan enters the picture. To paint it I will present some vital population statistics about Pakistan.

Demography is one reason for rethinking Pakistan's economic priorities. The country stands out in the world that is now witnessing rapidly declining birth rates. There are now 14 countries that have more than 100 million people each. Pakistan, with 220 million people in 2021, is the fifth largest. Of the 14 largest, Pakistan, with a population growth rate of 2% a year, has the third highest growth rate. Only Nigeria and Ethiopia, both at 2.6% a year rate of population increase, have higher growth rates. A birth rate sustained at this level over a period of time means a very young population. World's median population is 30.6 years which means that one-half of the population is below that age. Pakistan's median age is only 23.8 years or 78% of the global average. The Pakistani population is very young.

How does the Pakistani demographic situation compare with that of some of the more populated countries? Three of the 10 largest countries in terms of the size of their population are in South Asia. Pakistan, with an estimated increase of 2% a year, is seeing its population growing at a rate twice as high as those of Bangladesh and India. That notwithstanding, the country, at 287 people per square kilometre, is the least densely populated of the three. Bangladesh has the highest density with 1,265 persons per square kilometre. The Indian density with 464 persons is considerably higher than that of Pakistan.

Of the 10 largest countries, six are net exporters of people. India with net outmigration of 533,000 people in 2020 is the largest exporter followed by Bangladesh at 370,000 and Pakistan at 233,000. These numbers translated in terms of the proportion of the population tell a different story. Bangladesh is exporting 0.2% of its population, twice as high as Pakistan's 0.1%. India sends abroad only 0.04% of its population. A very large proportion of South Asian outmigration is to the oil exporting countries in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, with a population of 35 million, brings in 2.2 million people from the outside, mostly from South Asia and Egypt. United Arab Emirates, with a population of 10 million, has 84,000 foreigners being added every year. The US imports 955,000 people a year while four other English-speaking countries — the United

Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — also have large number of people moving in. Canada brings in 242,000 immigrants a year, Australia 158,000 and New Zealand 15,000.

These numbers mean that for Pakistan such a large and young population could become either a burden or an asset. To be the latter, public policy must be designed in a way that the youth could add to the country's economic strength. The youth's involvement in two sectors can produce this result. One is the development of information technology. The other is the development of small and medium enterprises that could enter global supply chains. Both need educated and well-trained workforces. Pakistan needs to invest in developing institutions both in the public and private sectors designed to produce such worker streams. Pakistan is in a position to take advantage of the developing demographic situation in the US.

Although the history of South Asian migration to the US is not as long and intense as that of the Chinese, the Sub-continent has one of the fastest growing population groups in the country. The number of South Asians in the country has increased from 2.2 million in 2000 to 4.9 million in 2015. In the six years since then, another 1.4 million South Asians came in, bringing the total to 6.3 million. The Indians have 70% of the South Asian migrants in the US. Pakistanis, with 700,000 people, has the second largest South Asian group. Those from Bangladesh number 182,000. South Asians including Pakistanis have high concentrations in the coastal cities of America; on the East and West coasts as well as on the coastal states in the country's south.

It is important for the Pakistani policymakers to work with those already living in the US to develop a working plan to facilitate the migration of Pakistanis to the US. The Pakistani diaspora could help out in making the Pakistani youth major contributors to the county's growth.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 31st, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2302516/population-and-pakistans-development>



# ECONOMY

---

## **Budget 2021: A Tough Call | Editorial**

All is not well with the world today. With economies still busy firefighting the uncertainties of the pandemic—second year in a row—designing a budget that lends a helping hand to all afflicted by the long-drawn-out malaise would be a very tough call to make. On top of that, PM Khan wants to push through development projects while containing the crippling inflation rate. A lofty goal, but one that would be hard to follow through.

Our fight with the coronavirus is far from over. Though Pakistan's industries have largely resuscitated from the earlier standstill (our exports touched a 10-year-high in March), the much steeper jump in our public debt and liabilities narrates a moribund tale of the finances. Amid such troubling times, the ruling PTI would hit all the right notes if it helps the nation find the sustenance it needs right now.

Given the centre stage that health care has taken due to the tragic pandemic, it goes without saying that we need a resilient health sector. Initiatives taken to widen the umbrella of vaccination coverage and expand the overall healthcare system, would, ergo, be celebrated nothing less than a hail Mary pass.

Yes, infrastructure projects (water supply, sanitation and transportation) are crucially important for public welfare. Therefore, the premier's decision to increase development funds of all provinces is a much-needed call. But any such noble directive should not be tainted by playing favourites with the constituencies. In the past, public-oriented development has been repeatedly tainted with the political designs of those at the helm of affairs. While Punjab's capital, Lahore, prospered at a rapid pace, cities nearby were still decades behind when it came to infrastructure. CM Buzdar might be an unpopular commodity in the provincial political arena, but the fact that he ring-fenced South Punjab's budget and spearheaded a multi-faceted development agenda in the most downtrodden districts under his reign, definitely, adds to his credentials.

Replicating the same model all across the country would help Imran Khan become the voice of Pakistan's most neglected areas.

It is obvious that his administration does not have a great external reputation. International media outlets spare no occasion to question his leadership or ridicule his policies. In their words, the skipper is destined to be a failure. Since nothing spells success like success, the government would be in a far better position if it comes up with a roadmap that revives the economy from the pit of degradation. Improving tax collection while focusing on income from other streams hold paramount importance in any budget. Yet, measures to support sectors with the potential to create jobs are just as crucial for public welfare. A sustainable growth rate is something the new finance minister needs to pull out of his magician's hat. Let's just hope Mr Tarin does well to offer the much-needed public relief his boss has eyes set on. We have long heard of representatives painting the town red over the positive financial momentum. Now is the time to translate those intricate numbers into policies that work for the common man. After all, seeing is believing! To a simple and succinct budget 2021 (for the relief of all of us)! \*

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/752017/budget-2021-a-tough-call/>

## **Path of Growth | Editorial**

FINANCE MINISTER Shaukat Tarin finally specified the future direction that the country's economic policy will take when he disclosed his intention to secure IMF relaxation in some of the harsh conditions linked to the Fund's \$6bn loan. In his testimony before a National Assembly panel, Mr Tarin, an outspoken critic of the IMF-mandated contractionary economic adjustments, was convinced that the country would be in deep trouble if the economy did not grow rapidly. "If we continue with economic stabilisation policies, there will be no growth, the absence of which is creating enormous problems for the country," he is quoted to have said. According to him, the economy needs to expand by a minimum of 5pc a year to increase revenues, create jobs and check debt accumulation — public and power both. A plan to put the economy on the growth path is ready. The idea is to meet IMF targets and conditions by expanding the economy instead of suffocating it. The plan aims to boost public development spending, broaden the tax net and leave power prices where they are.

This course correction isn't surprising. The prime minister had been under pressure from his party to break away from the stringent IMF conditions and give some relief to the people battered by inflation and unemployment. The situation worsened when the coronavirus gripped the world though temporary suspension of the programme provided some room for monetary and fiscal stimulus at home. The defeat of PTI candidates in the recent bypolls also bolstered party demands for a change in economic direction. The electoral losses are seen as an outcome of the government's poor economic performance.

Mr Tarin's assertion that Pakistan could no longer afford economic stagnation is spot on. With nations everywhere trying to support their economies through generous fiscal and monetary incentives because of the pandemic, it is unfair to think that a country like Pakistan can meet the IMF's difficult targets without hurting the people and the economy for a long time to come. Continuation of tough adjustments such as a drastic increase in electricity prices and taxes, in addition to the constraints on government spending, at a time when a new Covid wave has deepened economic and investment uncertainty would be disastrous. Although the economy has shown signs of recovery from the impact of the pandemic since last summer, it still remains fragile and in need of a stimulus to

return to the path of growth. The present growth momentum should be sustained. However, it is not possible without strong support from the IMF. It is time the Fund showed, in Mr Tarin's words, "kindness" and afforded the economy and the people some respite. Flexibility shouldn't be problematic for the Fund given that the government only wants to pursue a different strategy to put its economic house in order, without leaving the programme or abandoning its targets.

Published in Dawn, May 5th, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1622128/path-of-growth>

# **CPEC & ASEAN BY Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan**

During recent months many regional countries have showed their keen interest to join the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is indeed good omen for macro-economy of Pakistan.

It seems that the new “geo-economy” doctrine of Pakistan has played a vital role in this regard.

Moreover, rapidly changing geopolitical realities and geostrategic new dimensions have now changed the dynamics of regional connectivity and of course global engagement. Thus journey from geopolitics to geo-economics has been started.

Indonesia has now shown keen interest to join the CPEC. Due to constant “structural economic reforms”, Indonesia is widely rated as a future “economic giant”. It is the “largest economy” in Southeast Asia.

Now it is the world’s “7th largest economy” by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and a member of the “G-20”. It hopes that it may be the “5th largest economy” in the world by 2030 and fourth soon after.

On a market exchange rate basis, Indonesia ranks “16th” in the world but will likely enter the top ten by 2030. Thus it has a beneficial economic proposition with Pakistan & CPEC.

Thus mutual cooperation in diverse sectors of economy, trade & commerce, joint venture, FDIs, agriculture, science & technology, private sector, tourism, education and energy is brighten in which the CPEC may play a major role of mutual convergence.

Indonesia’s Ambassador to Pakistan Adam M Tugio appreciated Pakistan’s strategically location at the juncture of South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East which has vast potential to emerge as a hub of regional connectivity and economic activity. Thus CPEC is the connecting hub for the regional countries.

While delivering a keynote speech in the CGSS sponsored international webinar the Indonesian envoy has welcomed Pakistan's efforts to enhance regional connectivity and development through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

He highlighted immense potential of CPEC to create diverse investment opportunities and promote industrial, financial and agricultural cooperation.

On its part the Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS) has been advocating benefits of sustainable regional connectivity through the bench mark of the CPEC.

In this regard its continued online internship programs, interactive dialogues, meaningful seminars/conferences and webinars pertaining to different countries like Indonesia, Egypt, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and China is projected the real potential of Pakistan's economy and positive, productive and participatory role of the CPEC.

He outlined that the preferential trade agreement (PTA) signed between the two countries in 2012 was not just a start to elevate the bilateral trade volume but also a manifestation of common desire to further develop special ties through enhanced economic cooperation.

In this context, joining of Indonesia with CPEC would further strengthen scope and utility of Pak-Indonesia bilateral relations in the days to come.

He highlighted his country's structural reforms and measures to make PTA equally favourable for both countries, Indonesia agreed in 2019 to grant unilateral concessions on 20 additional tariff lines of Pakistan's export interest.

He termed education as one of the potential areas which can benefit people of the two countries.

He said the two nations fully realised the importance of cooperation at multilateral forums. Tugio showcased that both countries had worked closely on major regional and global issues and continued to work with mutual coordination and



cooperation at important regional forums including the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the ASEAN regional forum.

He was of the opinion that ASEAN and Pakistan have great potential for cooperation in various sectors as Pakistan's total trade with ASEAN of over \$7 billion suggests that there is huge scope for Islamabad to scale up its economic engagement with ASEAN.

Most recently, Pakistan persuaded foreign investors to invest in the country and the CPEC projects offered lucrative incentives towards Industrial transformation.

During the most recently held webinar jointly organised by Embassies of Pakistan and China in Jakarta, Pakistan's Board of Investment (BOI) presented Investment opportunities in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

It offered an opportunity to jointly explore the promising prospects of CPEC and to devise a way forward to bolster regional economic cooperation.

The participants vowed to further advance industrial cooperation among Pakistan, China and Indonesia.

Director Project Management Unit (PMU), Asim Ayub presented a detailed presentation on CPEC and briefed the audience about Industrial Cooperation under CPEC, various incentives available to investors under Special Economic Zones (SEZ) act.

He further said that Pakistan also offers sole enterprise option.

He emphasized that Pakistan is fully focused towards Industrial transformation and investors should take benefit of the lucrative incentives.

Addressing the webinar, Chairman BOI Atif Bokhari highlighted immense investment potential of the CPEC which has entered in its second phase and efforts are now focused on forging Business to Business (B2B) and Person to Person (P2P) collaborations in the form of industrial & socio-economic cooperation.

He pinpointed Pakistan's liberal investment regime which allows 100 percent repatriation of profits, dividends and capital.

In addition, Pakistan is actively pursuing development of SEZs and is offering attractive fiscal incentives including 10 year tax holiday on income & custom duty exemption on import of capital goods to both developers & enterprises.

He projected that the government has launched conducive policies for electric vehicles, mobile manufacturing and construction sectors in a bid to enhance investment profile of Pakistan.

He encouraged Indonesian & Chinese investors to be part of the shared future of industrialization & economic prosperity through the realms of CPEC.

Ambassador of China Xion Qian remarked that CPEC is a landmark project and it offers valuable opportunity to the three countries to explore trilateral cooperation & untapped business opportunities.

The participants identified that Pakistan & Indonesia can explore collaboration in the field of textile, food processing, agricultural products, infrastructural development, chemical & pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, gemstones, iron & steel to name a few, as Indonesian companies have vast experience & expertise in these areas.

The Indonesian speakers stated that their companies can help Pakistan in establishing downstream industry and also assist with value added products.

Secretary BOI Fareena Mazhar stated that Pakistan is taking several reform initiatives to streamline our business processes and offer a conducive business environment to both local and foreign investors.

Fareena shared that Pakistan would welcome Indonesian investment in sectors such as food & agriculture, value added textile, tourism, construction and also encourage investors to explore the electric vehicle sector as Pakistan offers tremendous scope for setting EV manufacturing units.

Being prominent regional expert of the CPEC & BRI I submit that Pakistan and Indonesia should further strengthen their bilateral economic cooperation, and trade & commerce activities through the flagship projects of the CPEC.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), digitalization, tourism, education, energy & food cooperation, and health may be the preferential areas for mutual cooperation.

Even goals of mutual massive industrialization, persuasion of green energies, hydropower generation and last but not least, infrastructure may be points of mutual convergence under the umbrella of CPEC between the two countries.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/cpec-asean-by-dr-mehmood-ul-hassan-khan/>

## **Reducing Deficit | Editorial**

THE numbers show that the government has managed to arrest growth in fiscal deficit — the difference between the government's income and expenditure — as a ratio of GDP during the first nine months of the present financial year to March. But the problem with numbers is that they are often used by governments to mask the reality. The government may have brought down the deficit to 3.6pc of GDP from 3.8pc a year ago through a reduction in development spending and a provincial surplus of nearly 1pc of the size of the economy. But the question is: can it keep it at that level during the last quarter of the fiscal? That would be near impossible. The fiscal gap is estimated to grow to at least 7.5pc by the close of the fiscal year as the government's bills become due, the expenditure side of its balance sheet expands and the provincial surplus disappears into thin air. That makes a lower deficit number at this stage irrelevant unless the government can contain it at that level in the last quarter as well.

The more important numbers in the summary of the country's fiscal operations relate to the spiking cost of debt servicing, and the burden placed on common people through indirect taxes and levies. The debt-servicing expense has shot up by almost 12pc to Rs2.1tr or equal to 82pc of total revenues, forcing the government to borrow more money to pay its other bills. The share of indirect taxes and levies — which impact, directly and heavily, low-middle-income groups — in revenues is surging. The collection of petroleum levy, for example, has jumped by a whopping 87pc and of indirect taxes by 14pc (compared to 9pc increase in direct taxes). The fiscal deficit is at the heart of our chronic economic troubles and the government's inability to invest in infrastructure to forge growth. Indeed, the government has been successful in achieving primary surplus — the difference between revenues and expenditure excluding debt payments — in the last two years. But this was done by curbing essential expenditure, especially development spending, at the cost of people's well-being and jobs rather than by increasing its tax revenues. There is no possibility of decreasing the overall budget deficit and controlling growth in public debt without rapidly raising tax collection. For that the PTI government will have to undertake tax reforms, which may hurt powerful lobbies. Does it have the political will for that? It has not really shown any so far.

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1622672/reducing-deficit>

# **Pak-Saudi Economic Ties and Vision 2030 By** **Shakeel Ahmad Ramay**

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman is on a mission to transform the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He has envisioned the kingdom as a country which will be vibrant, dynamic and diverse.

He wants to build an economy and society which can tackle the challenges of 21st Century. He is striving to diversify the economy and social fabric in the country.

It is not merely a dream as he is taking practical steps to achieve the goal. Saudi Arabia has drawn up a detailed blueprint of policies, actions and indicators with the title of Vision 2030, which will guide the transformation drive in coming years.

The Vision 2030 is an all-inclusive document, which follows principles of sustainable development and caters to future needs. It has been built on eight themes/ pillars which include healthcare, living standards, sustainability of resources, social development, government efficiency, labour market, enabling private sector, tourism and national heritage.

Saudi Arabia has identified diversification of economy as a leading factor to achieve the goal. The government is endeavouring to give a boost to non-oil sectors and exports.

Read: Pakistan, KSA relationship marked by close cooperation in all fields: PM Imran

Climate change is further accelerating the process as oil and other fossil fuel producers are under immense pressure. Thus, efforts will be made to increase the share of non-oil exports from 16% in 2016 to 50% in 2030.

The non-oil revenue will also be enhanced from 163 billion Saudi riyals in 2016 to SAR 1 trillion in 2030. It is a humongous task. It will require gigantic efforts to shift the focus from oil and create new sectors of economy and export.

To materialise the dream, Saudi Arabia has decided to enhance the role of private sector in the national economy. It will be achieved by adopting a multi-pronged policy and strategy.

Firstly, Saudi Arabia will continue to climb the ladder of competitiveness and reach the 10th position till 2030. Secondly, all efforts will be made to improve the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) ranking by taking practical steps.

Some comprehensive efforts will be made to simplify the registration process, improve the provision of utilities and security of investment.

Finally, the kingdom will allow foreign investors to buy property in certain designated areas. It is a landmark initiative as it is happening for the first time there.

Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia will be working to enhance the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the national economy. The vision has set their target share in the national economy at 35% till 2030.

It will be done by providing funding (20% till 2030) and improving the environment for SMEs. Private sector and SMEs have also been assigned the task of improving the job market and helping the government to bring down the unemployment rate to 7% by 2030. It has been assumed that the improved situation will attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and private sector. It will help to meet the targets of 5.7% FDI and 65% private sector share in the national economy till 2030. The vision also highlights the defence sector as an industry and plans to transform the existing functioning and composition of the industry. It is a well-known fact that Saudi Arabia is one of the leading importers of defence products due to a fragile security situation in the region.

It meets 98% of the requirement by importing defence products and the domestic share is only 2%. It is not a sustainable model, especially in the current fragile global order. Thus, the kingdom envisages that it will transform the existing composition and strive to achieve self-sufficiency in defence products. It has set the target of 50% share of local industry till 2030.



The Vision 2030 equally gives importance to environmental sustainability. The government is determined to protect the environment and follow environment-friendly business principles.

The vision document clearly mentions that apart from other things, it is also our religious duty. Hence, the kingdom will work hard to improve water conservation and combat desertification.

There is no doubt that the Vision 2030 is an excellent document but to achieve the goals, Saudi Arabia will have to go through comprehensive transformation. The first and foremost requirement will be to utilise the human and social capital. For that purpose, special programmes for education, skill development and healthcare will be needed.

Moreover, the government will try to reach the 10th position on the Social Capital Index.

### Opportunity for Pakistan

The discussion above underlines the fact that Saudi Arabia will be open for new economic partnerships and talent hunt. It is a good opportunity for Pakistan.

Although Pakistan enjoys excellent brotherly relations, these ties can be further strengthened by adopting a wise policy.

First of all, Pakistan should work to get maximum jobs for its nationals in Saudi Arabia under the Vision 2030 by building a strong base of skilled labour force. Unskilled labour will have very limited opportunities in the new economy of Saudi Arabia.

Second, Pakistan can also join hands to improve the human and social capital of Saudi Arabia through the provision of quality educationists and medical staff.

Third, environmental cooperation has emerged as a new area. Saudi Arabia is willing to benefit from Pakistan's experience in this regard. Pakistan should work with Saudi Arabia on concrete proposals in different areas including water conservation, climate smart cities, etc.

Fourth, the kingdom's food market is another area, where Pakistan can make a huge difference. Saudi Arabia meets its demand by importing 80% of food. It presents a window of opportunity, especially for halal meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables. Pakistan can also attract investment from Saudi Arabia in agriculture by adopting a programme of investment in food.

Fifth, renewed focus and emphasis on entertainment and sport events can also open fresh avenues for Pakistan.

Lastly, defence is an area where Islamabad and Riyadh can create a new history of cooperation. Both countries already have deep, objective-oriented and trustworthy defence relationship.

The goal of 50% self-sufficiency offers an opportunity to further strengthen this relationship.

Pakistan can also use its experience to help Saudi Arabia to build local industry and meet its needs on a sustainable basis.

Moreover, both countries can also work jointly in the field of research and development to climb the ladder of advancement in the defence sector. It will be a win-win proposition for both.

Concluding, Pakistan can benefit hugely from these opportunities by devising a strategic framework of cooperation. First step would be to establish a joint working group to facilitate cooperation under the Vision 2030.

Second, sector-specific sub-groups can be formed to further streamline work. Pakistan will have to avoid sporadic efforts or haphazard interventions because they will not be of any use, rather they will hurt the spirit of cooperation. CPEC and its long-term plan can provide guidance to develop a strategic framework of cooperation.

The writer is a Political Economist

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

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2299127/pak-saudi-economic-ties-and-vision-2030>

# **Propelling Economic Change By Malik**

## **Muhammad Ashraf**

The demographic features of the population of any country have a direct bearing on its economic development, more so when its bigger chunk consists of youth. The youth is universally acknowledged as the architect of the future of a country. Pakistan is one of the luckiest countries in that regard as 68 percent of its population is below the age of 30 years. Harnessing that potential requires equipping the youth with technical skills which enhance the chances of their employability within and outside the country as well as the availability of finances to those who have acquired necessary skills and technical know-how and are desirous of starting their own businesses, assuming the role of an entrepreneur.

An incisive appraisal of developed countries reveals that their phenomenal economic growth was propelled by entrepreneurship, which is rightly regarded as a key to economic prosperity. Entrepreneurship is the capacity and willingness to start a new business venture and the hallmark of entrepreneurial spirit is innovation and risk taking. Countries like the US, Japan, Denmark, Germany and Taiwan are aware of the role entrepreneurship can play in the economic development of a country and therefore are role models for other nations aspiring to achieve self-sustained growth in the ever-increasing competitive global market.

Entrepreneurship serves as a channel for spill-over of the knowledge acquired in one organisation and becoming commercialised through innovative activity in a new startup. The new startups ensure that the costly inventions and creative ideas created in one industry or business concern are shared, commercialised and converted into innovative pursuits which not only revolutionises those industries but also spurs economic growth, job creation and the development of a competitive culture within the country.

To promote entrepreneurship, it is important that people with innovative ideas and skills have access to vital entrepreneurial resources like money, talent and know-how to initiate new business, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises which are less volatile and more stable than the big industrial ventures due to their ability to provide bulk of the jobs in a country.

In view of the foregoing realities, it is encouraging to note a visionary and progressive initiative has been taken by the PTI government through the launch of the Kamyab Jawan programme with the aim to empower young people with skills, finances and self-reliance opportunities.

Under the programme launched in October 2019, Rs100 billion have been allocated for advancing loans to the youth out of which Rs25 billion would be given to the women entrepreneurs. Loans up to Rs100000 will be interest free whereas very low interest rates will be charged on loans in the range of Rs1million to Rs10 million and Rs10 million to Rs25 million. The initiative aims at facilitating one million young people.

So far Rs8 billion have been loaned out to 10,000 applicants including 8500 males and 1491 females for setting up their own businesses through participating banks.

Perhaps it would be pertinent to have a look at the components of the skill-imparting strategy which includes training of 50,000 youth of less developed areas; training of 50,000 youth in high-tech courses; certification of 50,000 skilled workers of the informal sector and training of 4000 accessories; apprenticeship training of 20,000 youth in industry; standardisation of 200 curricula; international accreditation of 50 Pakistani YVET institutes; a national Employment exchange tool; establishment of 76 smart-tech labs; 10 country of destination specific facilitation centres in 10 cities; 70 new labs and workshops in madrassas; establishing the National Accreditation Council at ICT; accreditation of 2000 YVET Institutes ; international training of 500 master trainers and in-country training of 2000 teachers and the establishment of 50 business incubation centres.

The Kamyab Jawan Programme is not only about providing finances to the youth to start their businesses and imparting technical skills but also aims at promoting their overall well-being. The programme envisages the establishment of the Youth National Council—a forum providing productive interaction between successful youth within and outside the country, the creation of a digital portal for youth, the establishment of a job placement bureau and a youth development index designed to analyse and monitor the impact of the initiative. One can hardly take an issue with the overall conceptualisation of the programme. It

undoubtedly has the promise and potential to change the economic profile of the country like developed countries which pursued this course as a deliberate policy.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/16-May-2021/propelling-economic-change>

## **Significant Growth | Editorial**

Financial Year 2020-2021's initial estimates of growth have come as a pleasant surprise to many, including perhaps the top economic minds of the government. Posting 3.94 growth percent across all sectors, this goes above even the most optimistic target—set by the State Bank at 3 percent. International organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank had instead made much more modest predictions; IMF had estimated 2 percent growth while WB had anticipated no more than 1.5 percent.

It is clear then, that the government's early optimism was well founded. The biggest stumbling block to growth in the past year has been the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting slowdown and stop-start economic activity. This would have theoretically affected the services sector the most, but the growth of 4.4 percent for tertiary activity instead suggests that this sector was doing all the heavy lifting in keeping the economy afloat.

US seeks 'equal security' for Israelis and Palestinians amid Gaza's 'grave' humanitarian situation

Industrial output also saw overall growth at 3.57 percent, but a big disappointment and potential problem in the next year is the agricultural sector, with only 2.77 percent growth in the year. This is something that the government must look to increase over the remainder of its term.

With these figures, even with the coronavirus pandemic ravaging businesses, the government can take a moment to pat itself on the back. The PTI government's most major criticism has been the state of the economy, and with this number, it can legitimately claim that it is slowly bringing the country back on track.

The next two years of the government are crucial in both determining the impact PTI's rule has had at the federal level, alongside setting the trajectory of the economy for the next five years. The challenges are still immense. Agricultural produce is affected on a yearly basis, and there is an urgent need to diversify, alongside heavily investing in the technology sector in order to catch up with global trends. There is also the government's own prioritisation of sectors such as tourism and construction; it must continue to strengthen these to leave a lasting impact and put itself in a good position for the polls at the end of the term.

The Prime Minister and his cabinet can enjoy this deserved moment, but there is no room to rest on our laurels as the government well understands.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/23-May-2021/significant-growth>



# **Pakistan's Growth Miracle By Hasaan**

## **Khawar**

The World Bank projected that Pakistan's economy would grow by 1.3% in 2020-21. The IMF predicted 1.5% growth, whereas the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) estimated 3%. But official (provisional) estimate of nearly 4% GDP growth exceeded all expectations. Pakistan's economy has indeed made a comeback from the pandemic, with a bang!

The services sector grew by 4.4%, industrial sector by 3.5% and agriculture 2.7%. Within services, the highest growth came from wholesale and retail trade, whereas within the industrial sector, it was the large-scale manufacturing that grew by 9%. Considering that these two sub-sectors together constitute 28% of the GDP and both suffered a serious contraction last year, these growth estimates are hardly surprising. Other major contributors to the growth include bumper crops of wheat, rice, sugarcane and maize, construction, finance & insurance and housing services.

Part of this growth may be attributed to our resilient economy with a rapidly growing population and a sizeable middle class. Then comes the low-base effect, owing to the contraction of our GDP last year. But attributing this entire growth miracle to low-base effect and resilience would be injustice to the government actions that contributed to this turnaround.

Pakistan's strategy to deal with Covid-19 — through NCOC-coordinated lockdowns and restrictions — aided in a quick recovery. The massive Covid-stimulus package worth Rs1.27 trillion (2.9% of GDP) greatly helped in battling the spread of the virus and provided much-needed targeted financial support to the poor and relief to businesses. Government's construction package also had a big role to play, as manifested in 8.3% growth posted by the construction sector and a massive increase of 25% in the cement sector. A drastic reduction in interest rate by the SBP and measures like Long-term Financing Facility (LTFF) and Temporary Economic Refinance Facility (TERF) for the businesses also contributed in stimulating growth. The government can therefore rightly claim the credit for this turnaround.

Some people have raised questions about the credibility of the data, but those claims do not seem to hold ground. These growth estimates reflect the performance of the previous finance minister. If anything, Shaukat Tarin would have benefitted from lower growth, which could have made next year's numbers healthier. The out-of-whack projections, however, underscore the need for having regular quarterly estimates of GDP, which can prevent such miscalculations.

Moreover, these numbers are not counter-intuitive. For instance, the growth in LSM is in line with long queues of booked orders for new SUVs and vehicles. Anecdotal evidence from textile industry also confirms that the factories are running at near-full capacity.

But is this growth sustainable?

Considering that the third wave of pandemic is subsiding, the recovery is likely to continue unabated. The indication that government will be holding off on tough IMF conditions and will instead be giving a pro-growth budget would also help. The government may be better off focusing on sectors that have performed poorly such as cotton, mining, and transportation & communication, which with some effort can yield greater dividends.

But further growth without investment will increase inflationary pressure and will also boost imports. The inflation is already on the rise, confirming that we may not have much more excess capacity. The trade deficit is also touching \$24 billion. For now, we are being compensated through high remittance inflows but if continued, this can lead to another current account crisis in the next three years. The government therefore needs to keep inflation under check, diversify exports and increase investment. All of this however is easier said than done and needs structural reforms.

In short, while this growth cannot be sustained without structural reforms, the next two to three years look good and more promising. It is therefore time to celebrate!

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

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2301343/pakistans-growth-miracle>

## **Rising Exports | Editorial**

EXPORTS from Pakistan continue to show an upward trend as overseas shipments jumped significantly by 13.6pc to \$20.9bn during the first 10 months of the present fiscal year from \$18.4bn a year ago as per Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data for the July-April period. The rebound in the nation's exports is a positive development as it suggests economic recovery in spite of the challenges from the countrywide resurgence of the coronavirus. Simultaneously, imports are also increasing — and faster than exports. The encouraging part is that the demand for imported raw materials and capital goods has seen substantial growth this year owing to improved economic conditions in the country as domestic industry upgrades technology and expands production capacity. Yet the increase in wheat, sugar and cotton imports, because of the poor performance of agriculture, should be a cause of concern for policymakers in Islamabad. Encouraged by this year's growth trend, the commerce ministry is proposing an export target of \$28bn for the next fiscal, which is more than 16pc greater than the expected export revenues of around \$24bn from Pakistan this year. Thus, Pakistan could almost double its exports to around \$42bn over the next five years if the present growth trend is sustained.

For Pakistan it is critical to boost its exports rapidly to ward off a balance-of-payments crisis in future. At present, the country has one of the lowest levels of exports in the world as a percentage of its GDP — around 8pc. According to the World Bank's World Development Indicators, the same ratio averaged 24.7pc for low-middle-income nations, 17.5pc for the South Asian countries and 24.4pc for highly indebted poor states back in 2019. Even though the rapid jump in remittances sent home by Pakistanis living abroad has cushioned the current account, the abysmally low exports-to-GDP ratio should worry policymakers as poor export performance has been the chief driver of balance-of-payment crises in the past. The present growth trend in exports is encouraging. But it also underscores the need for ensuring that it continues for a longer period. That will not be possible without producing more exportable surpluses, diversification of export products and markets, and improvement, in fact sophistication, in product quality. More importantly, the government needs to support the exporters in the quest to be internationally competitive, and increase productivity through skill and technology upgradation instead of doling out subsidies in different forms at the expense of taxpayers.

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1626330/rising-exports>

# EDUCATION

---

## **The Education Conundrum | Editorial**

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

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

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

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

## **CSS 2020 Result: Less Than 2% Pass the Competitive Exam**

Federal Public Service Commission on Thursday announced the results for the Central Superior Service (CSS) Exam 2020, with the passing ratio falling down from last year's 3% to less than 2% this year.

In this year's attempt only 1.96% of candidates were able to pass the competitive exam among the 18,553 candidates who appeared for it, the post-result statement said.

Three hundred and seventy-six candidates passed the written exam out of the 18,553 candidates. Of the 376 people, 226 were male, and 138 were female.

The total candidates who were recommended for appointment are 221 — 142 male and 79 female.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/831415-css-2021-result-less-than-2-pass-the-competitive-exam>

# **Rescuing Education From the Pandemic By**

## **Areebah Shahid**

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 22.8 million children of school-going age in Pakistan were not in schools. This staggering number made Pakistan host to the second largest population of out-of-school children in the world. The majority of these out-of-school children remained girls.

Prolonged school closures and the pandemic's far-reaching social and economic impact have further aggravated this situation. A recent study "Girls' Education & Covid-19 in Pakistan" suggests that girls' access to formal education in Pakistan is further expected to regress as a result of the steep decline in household incomes. With many households still struggling with the financial toll experienced during the initial lockdown phase, many girls of school-going age are expected to either enter labour to supplement their household incomes or simply be withheld from returning to school to curtail household expenses. In the same vein, according to conservative estimates by the World Bank, at least one million Pakistani children are likely to drop out of school by the end of the pandemic. In other words, half of the estimated 2.2 million children that were brought into schools over the last decade in Pakistan will be forced out of schools in little over a year.

With an entire decade's worth of gains rapidly rolling back, it goes without saying that Pakistan's frail education sector needs the state's urgent attention. The response to this impending crisis demands a coherent strategy that would prevent a roll-back on the gains made vis-à-vis education, especially girls in the last decade by incentivising education for the most marginalised. The response effort will also need to factor in the introduction of blended and alternate learning solutions for the millions of unprivileged learners whose access to education comes to a grinding halt each time schools are forced to shut down.

However, for any of this to materialise, Pakistan must seek to enhance fiscal space to steadily increase investment in education on the one hand and invest prudently on initiatives to give the country's frail education system a much-needed post-pandemic uplift, on the other.

Unfortunately, past precedent does not favour the educational prospects of millions of Pakistani children struggling to learn during the pandemic. As established by a recent white paper “Public Investment in Education: Covid-19 and Other Past Emergencies”, Pakistan has repeatedly failed to bring any substantial increase in its education development expenditure during the past twenty years. This holds true for both times of emergency and years of relative economic prosperity.

It goes without saying that Pakistan can neither achieve even a fraction of its development indicators nor become a country resilient to future shocks with a workforce that is largely illiterate and unskilled. For Pakistan’s fortune to ever truly change, the ruling elite will absolutely have to begin treating education as a high priority subject and its investment priorities will serve as the single most important indicator in this regard.

At the very least, the ministers for education at federal and provincial levels will have to fight a much stronger case for our children in the upcoming budget than they and their predecessors have fought in the past. With the pandemic already reversing the country’s educational gains, this enhanced investment needs to be made urgently: it needs to be made now.

Published in The Express Tribune, May 17th, 2021.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2300088/rescuing-education-from-the-pandemic>



# **Pandemic Education: Need For Investment**

**By Asim Bashir Khan**

DURING the past 12 months, approximately 42 million school students of pre-primary to higher secondary levels have been directly affected by the COVID-19 crisis in Pakistan.

In addition to pre-existing barriers, recent data emerging from Pakistan suggests that girls' access to formal education is further expected to recede as a result of the steep decline in household incomes.

With many households still struggling with the financial toll experienced during the initial lockdown phase, many girls of school-going age are expected to either enter labour to supplement their household incomes or simply be withheld from going to school to curtail household expenses.

With this sobering background, Pakistan no longer has the luxury to focus on bringing the massive pre-pandemic figure of 22.8 million out-of-school children into schools but must now actively strategize to prevent a roll-back on important gains made vis-à-vis education, especially girls' access to education in the last decade.

It is important to point-out here that the persistent state of education emergency in Pakistan has a significant fall-out on the country's ability to develop at a faster pace during relatively "good times" and makes Pakistan's economy highly vulnerable to economic shocks during times of emergency such as the current pandemic.

A close examination points at the fact that consistently dismal state of education financing in Pakistan – that in turn results in the country's dismal education indicators – is not necessarily a culmination of a series of crisis situations.

A recent white paper, "Public Invest in Education – COVID-19 & Other Past Emergencies," establishes that the cuts in education budgets and more specifically within the education development expenditure are a routine practice and have little to do with the fall-out of emergency situations.

For instance, during 2017-2018, Pakistan enjoyed a relatively good financial standing.

However, despite this Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan applied more than 40% cuts to their planned budgetary provisions for education while the federal government applied a one-third cut.

Similarly, during 2018-19, Sindh slashed its development budget for education by 62 per cent, followed by Balochistan, 54.4 per cent, federal government, 49.1% and KP, 14.7%.

Finally, for the most recent budget (fiscal year 2020-21), the trajectory seems to be a continuation of past trends rather than a result of the fall-out of an emergency situation.

Except KP, the non-development expenditure saw an increase in all the provinces and the federal government.

KP was also unparalleled in terms of its planned increase in the education development portfolio, which it enhanced by 46.2%.

This was followed by Sindh with a 7.7% increase and the federal government with a 1.4%. increase.

Balochistan and Punjab, on the other hand, budgeted cuts worth of 23.9% and 16.3%. respectively.

As per the government's claim of achieving a V-shaped recovery, the cuts in the education development expenditure in Balochistan and Punjab and the meagre increase at the federal level demand an empathetic review during the current fiscal year and a substantial increase going forward.

More importantly, structural issues such as incremental budgeting practices, inability to curtail non-development expenses and an absence of needs/targets-based budgeting need serious redressal to create the much-needed fiscal space for Pakistan's feeble education sector.

—The writer is an economist and Public Financial Management expert. He is currently a PhD candidate at IBA.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pandemic-education-need-for-investment-by-asim-bashir-khan/>

# WORLD

---

## **Softened Saudi Tone | Editorial**

THE surprising change in tone of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman towards Iran is indeed a welcome development in a region torn apart by war and geopolitical rivalries. In a recent TV interview, the kingdom's de facto ruler said he aspired to have a "good and special relationship" with Iran, though also chiding Tehran for its "negative behaviour". This conciliatory tone is far from the warlike statements the prince was issuing not too long ago, threatening to take the battle to Iran. Over the last few years, Saudi-Iranian relations — hardly cordial in the post-1979 period — reached their nadir when Riyadh executed Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Baqir Al Nimr, in retaliation to which a mob ransacked the kingdom's embassy in Tehran. Moreover, across the Middle East, both powers have been on the opposite ends of the geopolitical spectrum. Saudi Arabia remains part of the American geostrategic alliance in the region, whereas Tehran has been the biggest adversary of this bloc in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. Also, both countries have supported opposing parties in the Syrian civil war and the Lebanese political arena, while Riyadh and Tehran are fighting a brutal proxy war in Yemen. Given these realities, a Saudi-Iranian detente is a welcome development.

The major question is: what has prompted the crown prince to change course? Some say the change of guard in Washington may be the trigger. While the Trump administration gave a practical carte blanche to the Saudis, Team Biden does not appear to be as accommodating. Perhaps the realisation has dawned in Riyadh that instead of depending on outsiders to settle regional issues, the countries of the Middle East need to sort out their own problems. The Saudi prince's interview came after reports had emerged that Saudi and Iranian officials had met in Iraq to discuss a host of issues. Some observers have said senior intelligence and military officials from both sides were involved, while other key Arab states, including the UAE and Egypt, were also reportedly talking to Iran. This process must be carried forward in the interest of regional peace. Primarily, it is hoped some accord can be reached to end the destructive war in Yemen,

and to start rebuilding a shattered Syria. Any Saudi-Iranian rapprochement will also have a positive impact on Shia-Sunni relations across the Islamic world, and both Riyadh and Tehran need to put in their best efforts to make the effort succeed.

Published in Dawn, May 1st, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1621351/softened-saudi-tone>

## **Russia's Expanding Footprint In The Middle East – OpEd By Talmiz Ahmad**

Over the last month or so, the shadow of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has loomed large across the Middle East. In March, he visited the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. He was soon back in the region, visiting Egypt and Iran on April 12-13.

Russia became a key player in the Middle East when it brought its armed forces into Syria in September 2015 to prevent externally sponsored regime change. Having achieved this fairly quickly, its diplomatic canvas has broadened to include all the regional states, with which it is building substantial ties in the areas of energy, economics and defense, while seeking to pursue regional peace and security.

During his visit to the Gulf, Lavrov promoted a UAE role in enhancing stability in Syria, which his Emirati counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan strongly supported. The latter criticized sanctions on Syria and backed the country's re-entry to the Arab League.

In Doha, Lavrov shaped the Russia-Turkey-Qatar troika to discuss peace in Syria as an initiative to supplement the Astana process. Turkey and Qatar could jointly promote the settlement of the Idlib issue, where a few thousand Turkish-backed extremist elements are embedded within a 3 million-strong civilian population.

Lavrov's most important interactions were in Saudi Arabia, with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan. These meetings took place against the background of some uncertainty relating to the new US administration's position on regional security issues.

In this scenario, Russia can play the useful role of a "balancer" in respect of the Kingdom's two major competitions — with Turkey and Iran — by facilitating dialogue between them. Once mutual confidence between estranged neighbors is achieved, Russia will seek to obtain Middle East stability through a new regional security architecture shaped consensually by the area's nations acting in concert.

As in the case of other Gulf countries, Russia's agenda with Saudi Arabia is buttressed by substantial bilateral ties based on trade, including grain exports, and defense cooperation, besides being partners in the OPEC+ dialogue that ensures stability in the world's energy market.

Lavrov's foray to the Gulf states in March was complemented by his visits to Egypt and Iran in April. Though some commentators have seen the Cairo visit as a deliberate rebuke to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was meeting the Ukrainian president in Istanbul at the same time, the outreach to Egypt was important in itself.

Russia has consolidated its defense relations with Cairo through the sale of military hardware, including fighter jets, tanks, attack helicopters and missile systems, as well as regular joint exercises. Besides this, Russia is working on a nuclear power plant and developing a gas field in the country, while it has also become a major grain supplier to Egypt. Russia's ties with Egypt have been further strengthened by an Egyptian company emerging as the region's first manufacturer of Russia's coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V.

In Cairo, in terms of the regional agenda, Russia's two main interests were Libya and Syria. Russia and Egypt were already partners in the Libyan conflict, opposing the Tripoli government that is backed by Turkey, and they have also now become partners in the country's peace process. With regard to Syria, they are again on the same page, as Egypt has also consistently opposed regime change in Damascus.

Lavrov's visit to Tehran was in the context of coordinating their positions on the revival of the Iran nuclear deal. The two countries agree that this should be kept separate from the other issues relating to regional security and that there should be a "synchronized approach" to the US lifting sanctions and Iran returning to the provisions of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. In January, Russia and Iran had entered into an information and cybersecurity agreement that will boost Iran's cyber defenses against hostile attacks, mainly from Israel.

While Russia backs Iran on the nuclear question, it is also sensitive to the security concerns of Israel and the Gulf Arab states and, hence, strongly



advocates Tehran's participation in a regional security conclave taking place within the framework of the peace plan that Moscow had floated in July 2019.

Though Ankara was not on Lavrov's itinerary, ties with Turkey are an important part of Russia's regional interests. While bilateral ties have blossomed in energy, the economy and defense, Turkey remains a difficult partner as it seeks to retain its strategic autonomy on regional issues and its partnership with the US, despite their many differences. It is likely that Joe Biden's coolness toward the Turkish leader and Saturday's recognition of the Armenian genocide of 1915 will push Ankara further into the Russian embrace.

There is a churn being seen in Middle East politics, with regional states asserting new interests, playing new roles, engaging with fresh challenges, and building alliances to serve ideological and/or security interests. As the US recedes from the Middle East landscape, Russia will emerge as the central figure in the regional cauldron and is likely to offer the best hope for peace and security.

Talmiz Ahmad is an author and former Indian ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE. He holds the Ram Sathe Chair for International Studies at Symbiosis International University in Pune, India.

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/29042021-russias-expanding-footprint-in-the-middle-east-oped/>

# **A New Page in US History By Rashid A Mughal**

A jury last week found former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin guilty on all three charges stemming from the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, last year.

Chauvin was not expressive as Judge Peter Cahill announced his conviction on charges of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. The verdicts were read a day after jurors began their deliberations.

Video of Chauvin holding his knee on or near Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes last May, while Floyd was prone and handcuffed, spurred months of protests and reanimated the movement opposing police brutality against Black men. Second-degree murder carries a maximum sentence of 40 years in prison.

Third-degree murder has a maximum penalty of 25 years. Second-degree manslaughter has a maximum of 10 years.

Sentencing guidelines call for sentences short of the maximum. Judge Cahill said that sentencing would take place in eight weeks.

After the verdicts were read, Chauvin was handcuffed and escorted out of the courtroom.

Ben Crump, attorney for Floyd's family, said in a statement, "this case is a turning point in American history for accountability of law enforcement and sends a clear message which, it is hoped, is heard clearly in every city and every state".

President Joe Biden, in a phone call with Floyd's family that Crump recorded and posted online, pledged to accomplish meaningful police reform and told them that "nothing is going to make it all better, but at least now there's some justice."

Vice President Kamala Harris, who was also on the phone call, said: "We are going to make something good come out of this tragedy." Chauvin's high-profile

trial began in March and concluded on Monday in a Minneapolis courthouse fortified with barbed wire.

The case has been at the forefront of the anti-racist movement that gained steam during former President Donald Trump's term in office and ignited around the country in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The video of Floyd's death became a vivid illustration to many of the way Black men are often treated at the hands of law enforcement.

Whether Chauvin was found guilty or acquitted was widely seen as a test of America's system of justice.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, who oversaw the prosecution, said at a press conference that "George Floyd mattered. He was loved by his family and his friends.

He mattered because he was a human being, and there is no way you can turn away from that reality,".

He said that the verdict is not justice in itself, but that it is "accountability, which is the first step toward justice."

Top Democrats in Congress cheered the decision. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y, said in a statement that the "guilty verdict serves as an official proclamation of what so many of us have known for nearly a year: George Floyd was murdered by an officer who was sworn to protect and serve.

However, we should not mistake a guilty verdict in this case as evidence that the persistent problem of police misconduct has been solved or that the divide between law enforcement and so many of the communities they serve has been bridged," Schumer said.

"We must remain diligent in our efforts to bring meaningful change to police departments across the country."

Former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama said in a joint statement, “Today, a jury did the right thing. But true justice requires much more.

True justice requires that we come to terms with the fact that Black Americans are treated differently, every day,” the Obamas said.

“It requires us to recognize that millions of our friends, family, and fellow citizens live in fear that their next encounter with law enforcement could be their last.”

After the verdict was read, celebrations erupted at the courthouse and at the Cup Foods where Floyd was killed.

A trial for three of the other officers involved in Floyd’s arrest, Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng, and Tou Thao, is set to begin in August.

Chauvin’s attorney, Eric Nelson, earlier indicated that his client would appeal a guilty verdict on the basis that jurors may have been impermissibly swayed by outside forces.

Nelson cited comments by Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., who urged protesters to become confrontational if the jury acquitted Chauvin.

The tense atmosphere surrounding the trial was amplified in recent weeks by a spate of police killings that have led to more protests.

On April 11, 2021, Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, was killed by a police officer in nearby Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. The officer, Kimberly Potter, later claimed that she thought she was using a Taser.

Potter has resigned and been charged with second-degree manslaughter. Adam Toledo, a Latino 13-year-old, was shot and killed by a Chicago police officer on March 29, 2021.

Footage of the seventh grader’s killing, which fueled anguish in Chicago and around the country, was released amid Chauvin’s trial.

According to National Fraternal Order of Police “ the trial was fair and due process was served. We hope and expect that all of our fellow citizens will respect the rule of law and remain peaceful tonight and in the days to come.”

Minnesota Governor, Tim Walz said “Today’s verdict is an important step forward for justice in Minnesota. The trial is over, but our work has only begun.

The world watched on May 25, 2020, as George Floyd died with a knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes.”

Thousands of Minnesotans marched in the streets last summer in the wake of his death — inspiring a movement around the globe.

While many of these people never met George, they valued his humanity. They knew what happened was wrong. They called for change, and they demanded justice.

Hillary Clinton, Former U.S. Secretary of State and Democratic Presidential Candidate said “George Floyd’s family and community deserved for his killer to be held accountable. Today, they got that accountability.

Always and forever, Black lives matter.” UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said “I was appalled by the death of George Floyd and welcome this verdict.

My thoughts tonight are with George Floyd’s family and friends.” According to American Civil Liberties Union “For the first time in Minnesota state history, a white police officer has been held accountable for killing a Black man.

While today’s verdict is a small win for police accountability and may help heal a grieving community, the systems that allowed George to be murdered — ripping him away from his family and the communities that loved him so much — remain fully intact.”

National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People said “Justice has prevailed in the case against George Floyd’s killer Derek Chauvin, but the work is not done! We must keep fighting to end qualified immunity, and we must get #PoliceReformNOW.”

In a country with 83% white majority and 14% black population, which remains marginalized with poverty running high, emotions were running high.

The conviction of Derek Chauvin re-affirmed that justice is not dead in spite country being deeply divided. Justice may be blind but it can see in the dark.

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

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/a-new-page-in-us-history-by-rashid-a-mughal/>

# **Afghanistan's Moment of Risk and Opportunity By Ashraf Ghani**

President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw the remaining 2,500 U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September represents a turning point for the country and our neighbors. The Afghan government respects the decision and views it as a moment of both opportunity and risk for itself, for Afghans, for the Taliban, and for the region.

For me, as the elected leader of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, it is another opportunity to reiterate and further my commitment to peace. In February 2018, I made an unconditional offer of peace to the Taliban. That was followed by a three-day cease-fire in June of that year. In 2019, a loya jirga (grand council) that I convened mandated negotiations with the Taliban, and since then, my government has worked to build a national consensus on the need for a political settlement that would comport with the values of the Afghan constitution and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My government remains ready to continue talks with the Taliban. And, if it meant peace would be secured, I am willing to end my term early.

For the Afghan nation, the announcement of the U.S. withdrawal is another phase in our long-term partnership with the United States. Afghanistan has been through consequential withdrawals before. In 2014, the year I first took office, 130,000 U.S. and NATO forces withdrew, allowing Afghans full leadership of the security sector and of the institutions that our international partners had helped us build. Since then, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have protected and upheld the republic and made it possible for the country to carry out two national elections. Today, our government and our security forces are on a much stronger footing than we were seven years ago, and we are fully prepared to continue serving and defending our people after American troops depart.

The withdrawal also represents an opportunity for the Afghan people to achieve real sovereignty. Over the past 20 years, 40 different countries have deployed security forces to Afghanistan. Soon, however, all decisions regarding military approaches to the Taliban and other terrorist groups will be made by the Afghan



government. Indeed, the Taliban's justification for war—jihad against a foreign power—will cease to apply.

The U.S. decision surprised the Taliban and their patrons in Pakistan, and it has forced them to make a choice. Will they become credible stakeholders, or will they foster more chaos and violence? If the Taliban choose the latter path, the ANDSF will fight them. And if the Taliban still refuse to negotiate, they will be choosing the peace of the grave.

To avoid that fate, the Taliban must answer critical questions about their vision for Afghanistan. Will they accept elections, and will they will commit to uphold the rights of all Afghans, including girls, women, and minorities? Negative answers to those questions were suggested by the Taliban's recent decision to pull out of a peace conference that was supposed to begin in Istanbul at the end of April. The Taliban, it seems, remain more interested in power than in peace. A political settlement and the integration of the Taliban into society and government is the only way forward. But the ball is in their court.

#### THE FUTURE THAT AFGHANS WANT

Afghans cannot and absolutely will not go back to the horrors of the 1990s. We are not idly waiting for peace to chance upon us but continue to take steps to create the environment and platform for it to take hold. The risks of the U.S. withdrawal have been widely propagated in the news media, but we see little serious discourse about the opportunities it presents.

All international stakeholders and the Afghan people want a sovereign, Islamic, democratic, united, neutral, and connected Afghanistan. The Afghan people affirmed their support for that end state at a peace jirga in August 2020. The international community affirmed its desire for that end state in March 2020 when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2513, which made clear that the world does not want the return of the Taliban's emirate.

It is far less clear, however, what the Taliban want. They demand an Islamic system—but that already exists in Afghanistan. For any negotiations over a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban to succeed, the Taliban must articulate their desired end state with clarity and detail.

Negotiations would require a credible and neutral mediator. That need is highlighted by the talks in Doha between the Afghan government and the Taliban; the talks lack such a mediator and have, so far, reached an impasse. The best-placed organization for this role would be the United Nations.

If the Taliban refuse to negotiate, they will be choosing the peace of the grave. The first topics of negotiation must be reaching the desired end state and putting in place a comprehensive cease-fire to bring peace and respite to the daily lives of the Afghan people and to restore credibility and faith in the peacemaking process. Because cease-fires established during peace negotiations often fall apart, however, it is critical that we have international monitoring.

Next, the parties would have to discuss and decide on a transitional administration. Although the structure of the republic must remain intact, a peace administration would maintain order and continuity while elections were planned and held. This transitional authority would have a short tenure, and it would end as soon as presidential, parliamentary, and local elections determined the country's new leadership. I would not run for office in such an election, and I would readily resign the presidency before the official end of my current term if it meant that my elected successor would have a mandate for peace.

The negotiations would confront difficult issues, such as whether and how the Taliban would end their relationship with Pakistan, which provides them with support for logistics, finances, and recruitment. The talks must also address the Taliban's ongoing connections to al Qaeda, which the UN detailed in a 2020 report. Thus it is crucial that the Afghan government and the Taliban also agree on an approach against the Islamic State (or ISIS), al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups and that our agreement include a framework for counterterrorism that secures guarantees of support from other countries in the region and from international organizations. The agreement must also ensure the continuation of high-level regional diplomacy and welcome the involvement of the UN secretary-general's personal representative.

Once the Afghan government and the Taliban have reached a settlement, the Afghan people would need to publicly endorse it through our country's highest form of national consensus building: a loya jirga, a grand meeting of male and female community leaders from every province. The Taliban have been deprived of immersion in Afghan society for the past 20 years, and a loya jirga would offer

an ideal opportunity for their leadership to interact with all segments of the population.

The Afghan people want a country that is sovereign, Islamic, democratic, united, and neutral.

After a political settlement has been negotiated, inked, and endorsed, the hard work of implementation would begin. This is the process of building peace. There is always a temptation to make the temporary permanent, which is why the peace government must prioritize elections.

In the interim, however, the transitional leadership would have to make a series of hard decisions about how to govern. Economic development, education and health services, and other key functions of the state would have to continue without disruption. Any stoppage would have disastrous ramifications for the Afghan people and for the economy. There would also be new priorities, such as releasing prisoners of war; integrating members of the Taliban in all levels of government, the military, and society; and addressing the grievances of those who have lost loved ones, property, and livelihoods during the past two decades of war.

A newly elected government will have an important mandate to sustain peace and implement the agreement. That may require making amendments to the constitution. The constitution makes clear that, except for the Islamic character of the state and the fundamental rights of citizens, all else is subject to amendment, and there are mechanisms in place to enact those changes.

The new government would also confront the reintegration of refugees (particularly those who fled to Iran and Pakistan), the resettlement of internally displaced people, and the often overlooked issue of national reconciliation. Meanwhile, the transitional cease-fire would have to give way to a situation in which state institutions command a legitimate monopoly on the use of force. And Afghanistan would need to commit to permanent neutrality in order to mitigate the risk of regional conflicts. The UN General Assembly or the UN Security Council would be the ideal venues for establishing and formalizing Afghanistan's neutral status.

## THE PATH AHEAD

Even in an ideal environment, achieving a just and lasting peace would not be an easy journey. And unfortunately, the environment we are operating in is not ideal. There are many risks that this process could be derailed or disrupted, and Afghans may lose yet another opportunity for peace.

For one, the perception of uncertainty, fueled by dire predictions in the media, may incline many Afghans to leave the country. This could lead to a repeat of the refugee crisis that unfolded in 2015 and would deprive the country of talented people right at the moment when they are most needed.

Another risk is that a disrupted or disorderly transition could threaten command and control within the country's security sector. There must be an orderly political process to transfer authority so that the security forces are not left without leadership and direction. Moreover, it is critically important that the United States and NATO fulfill their existing commitments to fund the ANDSF. This is perhaps the single most important contribution that the international community can make to a successful transition to peace in Afghanistan.

There is also a risk that Afghan political figures will not galvanize around an orderly peace process. Thus we are reaching out to ensure that the process is inclusive, not only of internal political figures and different strata of Afghan society but also of regional actors who could potentially attempt to spoil the process.

The main risk to peace, however, is a Taliban miscalculation. The Taliban still believe their own narrative that they have defeated NATO and the United States. They feel emboldened, and because their political leaders have never encouraged their military branch to accept the idea of peace, the greatest risk is that the Taliban will continue to show no earnest interest in making a political deal and will instead opt for continued military aggression.

It is not too late for Pakistan to emerge as a partner and stakeholder in an orderly peace process.

If that is what happens, the Afghan government and the security forces are ready. As we prepare for peace talks with the Taliban, we are also prepared to face them on the battlefield. Over the last two years, more than 90 percent of Afghan military operations have been conducted entirely by Afghan security forces. Should the Taliban choose violence, it would mean a major confrontation

over the spring and summer months, at the end of which the Taliban would be left with no good options except to come back to the negotiating table.

Pakistan might also miscalculate in a way that threatens peace. There have been positive signs that Pakistan will choose the path of regional connectivity, peace, and prosperity, as indicated in remarks delivered in March at the Islamabad Security Dialogue by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Pakistani army chief of staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Those remarks could signify an important pivot from a destructive to a constructive approach to relations with Afghanistan. Now is the opportunity to put those words into action.

If Pakistan chooses to support the Taliban, however, then Islamabad would be opting for enmity with the Afghan nation and would be foregoing the enormous economic benefits that peace and regional connectivity would offer. Pakistan would become an international pariah, as it would be left with no leverage in the aftermath of the U.S. troop withdrawal. The Pakistani government miscalculated in its response to the United States' plan of action for Afghanistan and the region, but it is not too late for Islamabad to emerge as a partner and stakeholder in an orderly peace process.

As we move into uncharted waters for Afghanistan, I am focused on achieving the best possible outcome of this long period of conflict: a sovereign, Islamic, democratic, united, neutral, and connected Afghanistan. I am willing to compromise and sacrifice to achieve that. The withdrawal of U.S. troops is an opportunity to get us closer to that end state, but only if all Afghans and their international partners commit to a clear path forward and stay the course.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2021-05-04/ashraf-ghani-afghanistan-moment-risk-and-opportunity>

# **China and Russia's Dangerous Convergence**

**By Andrea Kendall-Taylor and David**

**Shullman**

In March 23, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, sat down for an auspiciously timed meeting. The high-level talks came just a day after an unusually heated public exchange between senior U.S. and Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska, and in sharp contrast, the Chinese and Russian foreign ministers struck an amicable tone. Together, they rejected Western criticism of their human rights records and issued a joint statement offering an alternative vision for global governance. The U.S.-led international order, Lavrov said, “does not represent the will of the international community.”

The meeting was noteworthy for more than its rhetoric, however. Within days of it, Russia began amassing troops along Ukraine's border—the largest number since Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Simultaneously, China began conducting highly publicized amphibious assault exercises and air incursions into Taiwan's so-called air defense identification zone at the highest frequency in nearly 25 years. These military moves have reignited concerns in Washington about the potential depth of Chinese-Russian coordination.

For the United States, confronting these decidedly different adversaries will be a tall order, and the two countries will inevitably divide Washington's attention, capabilities, and resources. The events of the last several weeks make clear that the administration of President Joe Biden will have difficulty managing Chinese behavior without addressing Moscow's support for Beijing and that Washington must now calculate how its response to one adversary will shape the calculus of the other.

The problems the two countries pose to Washington are distinct, but the convergence of their interests and the complementarity of their capabilities—military and otherwise—make their combined challenge to U.S. power greater than the sum of its parts. China, in particular, is using its relationship with Russia to fill gaps in its military capabilities, accelerate its technological innovation, and complement its efforts to undermine U.S. global leadership. Any effort to address

either Russia's or China's destabilizing behavior must now account for the two countries' deepening partnership.

### AN EMERGING LINK

The Biden administration has signaled that China is its number one foreign policy priority. The president has called Beijing Washington's "most serious competitor" and emphasized that China's economic abuses, human rights violations, and military capabilities pose a threat to U.S. interests and values. At the same time, the administration has rightfully downgraded Russia to a second-tier concern. But Washington shouldn't underestimate Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin oversees over a highly capable military and has shown that he is willing to use it. Fearful of irrelevance, Putin is looking for ways to force the United States to deal with Moscow and likely views a relationship with Beijing as a means to strengthen his hand.

Russia has pursued such ties in part by selling sophisticated weaponry to the Chinese military. Russian-made systems strengthen China's air defense, antiship, and submarine capabilities, which serve to bolster China's posture against the United States in the Indo-Pacific. Russia and China have been conducting joint military exercises—including strategic bomber patrols in the Indo-Pacific and naval drills with Iran in the Indian Ocean—of increasing frequency and complexity. Such activities signal to other countries that Beijing and Moscow are willing to challenge U.S. dominance. Moreover, the two states have developed technological cooperation that might eventually allow them to innovate faster together than the United States can on its own.

Any effort to address Russia's or China's behavior must account for the two countries' deepening partnership.

The link between the two countries is more than strategic, as China and Russia are learning from each other when it comes to authoritarian tactics. Beijing's aggressive rollout of COVID-19 disinformation campaigns, for instance, demonstrates that its leaders have begun to adopt long-standing Kremlin methods. Rather than merely promoting and amplifying positive narratives about the Communist Party, Beijing's campaigns seek to sow confusion, dissension, and doubt about democracy itself. Following cues from Beijing, Moscow in turn is learning to roll back the relative freedom of Russia's online sphere—a task made more urgent since Alexei Navalny returned in January and mass protests swept



the country. Through shared means, China and Russia popularize authoritarian governance, water down human rights protections, and create dangerous norms around cyber- and Internet sovereignty. The two countries back each other up on these matters in multilateral forums. Some of this coordination is undoubtedly more incidental than purposeful, but the two countries are singing from the same sheet of music.

For Russia, the economic benefits of a strong relationship with China are never far from view. Moscow is working with Beijing to mitigate the effects of U.S. and European sanctions and, ultimately, to reduce Washington's centrality to the global economic system—a change that would reduce the efficacy of U.S. economic tools. The Kremlin has turned to Beijing for capital investment, a market for arms exports, and defense components that Russia can no longer access in the West. After the frosty U.S.-Chinese meeting in Alaska, Lavrov highlighted the need to move away from using the dollar and Western-controlled international payment systems.

## HOW TO PUSH BACK

The new U.S. administration has framed the competition with China and Russia in ideological terms—a “fundamental debate about the future and direction of our world,” as Biden put it. This approach is sound. China and Russia are working to undermine liberal democracy, a concept that both regimes view as a direct threat to their aspirations and grip on power. For this reason among others, the two countries seek to weaken the U.S. position in important regions and international institutions.

The Biden administration's recommitment to allies and multilateralism will hobble such efforts. Likewise, Biden's efforts to strengthen democratic political systems will hurt Chinese and Russian attempts to sow doubt about their desirability. Coordinated efforts to develop resilient cyber- and election infrastructure and elevate anticorruption policies can help blunt the effects of malign interference.

Still, the United States cannot base its strategy solely on reasserting its leadership and protecting democracy, because China and Russia are linked not only by the alignment of their worldviews but also by the complementarity of their resources and capabilities. The Kremlin, for example, does not believe that it has an economic future in the West. As financial stagnation and the risk of domestic instability mount, China has become an ever more important partner. Striking at

the foundation of that relationship will require Washington to show Moscow that some degree of cooperation with the United States is preferable to subservience to Beijing. Shaping Moscow's calculus in this way will not prevent Chinese-Russian cooperation altogether, but it can limit the most malignant implications of their alignment.

The Chinese-Russian relationship is not impermeable.

Some policymakers and analysts have recommended a "reverse Nixon" strategy of cozying up to Russia to pull it away from China. We instead suggest a far more modest and incremental approach designed to demonstrate to the people around Putin the benefits of a more balanced and independent Russian foreign policy. The ground for pursuing such a strategy is narrow, but Washington could start with its stated desire to use the February extension of the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty as a jumping-off point for dialogue on arms control, strategic stability, and nonproliferation. The United States could further engage with Moscow to facilitate Iran's return to the 2015 nuclear deal and secure a stable peace in Afghanistan.

In the Arctic, too, the United States could work to slow Moscow's turn toward Beijing. Washington should immediately move to restart the Arctic Chiefs of Defense (CHODS) forum, a space for dialogue with Russia and other U.S. Arctic partners about the region's growing militarization. Although the Arctic Council is the area's primary governing body, its mandate does not include security and military issues. The Arctic CHODS forum could be charged with designing military guidelines to avoid conflict among all parties. Such efforts would not only stave off a dangerous escalation that could derail other U.S. policy priorities but might also provide a springboard for additional U.S.-Russian cooperation.

#### DRIVE SMALL WEDGES

Russian actions, including military escalations and persistent efforts to undermine democratic institutions, limit diplomatic possibilities in the near term. Meaningful engagement will be minimal so long as Putin remains in power. Sustained and incremental efforts to work with Moscow in ways that advance U.S. interests, however, can demonstrate to the elite around Putin that an alternative to subservience is possible.

In the meantime, Washington will need to devote more resources to monitoring and countering the effects of Beijing and Moscow's collaboration. The Biden

administration should conduct regular war games that stack the United States, and potentially its NATO allies, opposite China and Russia. Washington should prepare to counter coordinated interference campaigns meant to manipulate public discourse and undermine faith in the U.S. electoral system. China and Russia have likely stepped up their intelligence sharing and efforts to counter U.S. intelligence operations in both countries. U.S. agencies will therefore need to factor heightened counterintelligence concerns into their attempts to collect information on defense cooperation, technology co-development, and undisclosed arms transfers.

The Chinese-Russian relationship is not impermeable, and the United States should not shy away from proactive measures to exploit its fissures. U.S. efforts to capitalize on minor tensions may not change the overall trajectory of the two countries' relationship. But driving even small wedges between the partners can contribute to friction and mistrust that limit the extent of cooperation. In the Arctic, for example, Russia is seeking to limit the role of non-Arctic states— especially China—in regional governance. The United States should support Moscow in this endeavor, as it shares an interest in limiting Chinese influence in the region. Separately, Russia is a major arms seller to countries that have territorial disputes with China, including India and Vietnam. Yet the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act—passed by Congress in 2017 to limit Kremlin revenue from arms exports—prevents Russia from selling weapons to New Delhi. Policymakers should consider providing India with a waiver to purchase Russian weapons, thereby allowing natural fissures between Beijing and Moscow to grow.

Finally, Washington should be far more vocal with Moscow about how Chinese behavior harms Russian interests. A long-standing tenet of Russian foreign policy is to establish Moscow as an independent and unaligned actor in a multipolar world. Some analysts and Russian elites are therefore concerned about Russia's growing subservience to Beijing. As China encroaches on Russian interests in Belarus, Iran, and elsewhere, the United States should seek to raise questions among the Russian people and ruling elite about the wisdom of the current approach, in the hope that future leaders will chart a more neutral course.

The Biden administration already has a long list of urgent China- and Russia-related tasks. The effort to curtail the two countries' relationship belongs in that

catalog. Creative thinking about how to limit cooperation between Beijing and Moscow—while avoiding actions that reinforce their entente—will be critical to protecting U.S. interests and liberal democracies in the decades to come.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-05-03/china-and-russias-dangerous-convergence>

## **Riyadh-Tehran Thaw | Editorial**

SEVERAL official pronouncements over the last few days have confirmed that efforts are underway behind the scenes to mend the broken Saudi-Iranian relationship. On Monday, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry said that talks had indeed been held to improve relations between the cross-Gulf rivals. An official of the Saudi foreign ministry had a few days earlier also affirmed the fact that dialogue was under way. Meanwhile, the key indicator that ties were set to improve was a TV interview Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman gave late last month, in which he said the kingdom sought to have a “good relationship” with the Islamic Republic, though Riyadh’s de facto ruler added that he was wary of Iran’s “negative behaviour”. This was seen as a distinct change in tone, as earlier the Saudi leadership had adopted a hawkish stand towards Tehran, pledging to take the battle to Iran.

While the signals are definitely positive, no one should expect an immediate transformation in the bilateral relationship from combativeness to exchanges of brotherly feelings. Officials of both foreign ministries have been cautious about the prospects, with the Iranian side saying “let us wait [and] see”, while the Saudis have observed that it would be “premature” to comment on specifics. Perhaps the change in tone, particularly in Riyadh, has been triggered by the change of guard in Washington. The Trump administration pursued an antagonistic policy towards Iran, pampering Israel and urging America’s Gulf allies to forge a united front against Tehran together with Tel Aviv. However, with the arrival of Team Biden, the language and emphasis — particularly where the Middle East is concerned — of the White House has changed. Perhaps those that matter in Riyadh have realised the mood in the US, and have decided that the best way to sort out issues in the region is for the countries of the Middle East to reach a modus vivendi themselves without depending on outside players. Apparently, the Saudi rapprochement with Qatar is part of the same strategic thinking.

Both the Saudis and the Iranians must realise that good relations between them are critical at this juncture not only for the bilateral relationship, but also for peace and stability of the wider region and within the Muslim world. For starters, they can help end the devastating war in Yemen, where both capitals support opposing sides. Moreover, at a time when Israel is once again mercilessly

pounding the Palestinians, unity within the Muslim world is of the essence, to send a clear message that the slaughter of defenceless people will not be tolerated. There is a wide ideological and geopolitical divide between Riyadh and Tehran. But this does not mean both states have to live in a perpetual state of confrontation. Both must aim to respect each other's sovereignty and work for de-escalating tensions across the Muslim world.

Published in Dawn, May 16th, 2021

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1623868/riyadh-tehran-thaw>

## **Resuming Peace Talks | Editorial**

In a surprising turn of events, the negotiators of the Afghan government and the Taliban met in Qatar on Friday, the second day of Eid-ul-Fitr. The development gives hope to many who feared that the deadlock between the two negotiating sides would continue even after the American withdrawal. The recent meeting offers a glimmer of hope for the ordinary Afghans in the days to come, as the negotiating teams of the Afghan government and the Taliban have recommenced their meetings to chalk out a future political course for the war-torn country.

It is great seeing that the Taliban have also realised that there is no way other than participating in the intra-Afghan dialogue. Nevertheless, the question worth asking is this: what prompted the Taliban to take part once again in the halted peace process? The answer lies in the increasing violence in Afghanistan and the resultant political pressure. What is clear in the case of Afghanistan is that the Taliban have lost their monopoly on the use of violence. Another party that is equally effective in this tactic is the Islamic State (IS). It is the presence of IS in Afghanistan that best explains the Taliban's sudden change of mind.

Given the fact that no side to the conflict possess the ability to subdue the other in short term and the accelerated violence from the IS are two reasons for the two sides to cooperate. It would be prudent if the Afghan government and the Taliban let each other know of their intentions towards peace and stability in Afghanistan to weed out the external spoilers. In the meanwhile, the international community must use its technical and financial assistance, which the future Afghan government will need to rebuild the country, to pressurise the parties in the conflict to agree to power-sharing and peace.

Source: <https://nation.com.pk/17-May-2021/resuming-peace-talks>



# **China-Iran Strategic Deal: Where does India Stand? By Dost Muhammad Barrech**

MARCH 27, 2021 is a momentous day in the annals of the history of China- Iran relations, as both states on that day inked a 25-year economic cooperation deal.

The deal, by and large, will bring rapid geo-political and geo-economic changes in the Middle East.

Iran was desperately waiting for such a historic deal to happen in the backdrop of the US sanctions against the former.

China, meanwhile, is deeply pondering over the regional dynamics, trying to exploit the rift between the US and Iran, will capitalize Iranian oil and gas to keep its industries running.

China-Iran strategic deal and growing convergence of interests between them puts New Delhi in a deep quandary.

The deal turns out to be a burning issue in the sphere of area experts: However, a question remains: how does India view the China-Iran deal?

New Delhi is fully cognizant of the emerging realities in the region, knowing the deal will expand China's political and economic influence in the Middle East, creating worries for India.

Beijing will invest US \$400 billion in Iran, a whopping amount of US\$ 280 billion is anticipated to be invested in Iran's energy sector, the remaining US\$120 billion will be invested in Iranian banking, telecommunications, healthcare, ports, railways and information technology.

The deal also underpins military cooperation, training exercises and intelligence sharing between the two countries.

Chinese US\$ 280 billion investment in Iranian energy sector jeopardises the Indian oil and gas imports.

Experts assume China's presence in Iran's energy sector will halt India from Iranian oil and gas import. As the saying goes "whoever controls energy, controls destiny".

The said adage is likely to be true as far as controlling of Indian destiny is concerned. A political analyst on Eurasia Esref Yalinkilici, maintains, "You can see China wherever oil is".

Since 2017, China has remained the world's largest importer of oil and in 2020 had surpassed the US, the former currently is the largest importer of oil.

It is pertinent to mention here that China, despite the US sanctions on Iran, has continued to be the largest importer of Iranian oil.

Engrossingly, the deal is also a part of a new cold war alliance in the region. China intends to counter the Quad known as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue led by the US; the former has resultantly been spearheading an "alliance of autocracies" attributed to forming "trans-Himalayan Quad".

India and Iran in existing global power competition of the US and China witness a vivid divergence.

New Delhi is a main player of the US in promotion of Quad and democracy while Iran, a crucial ally of China in consolidation of Chinese led "alliance of autocracies" promotes Chinese interest greatly.

Presumably, "Quad vis-e-vis alliance of autocracies" will deepen the rift between New Delhi and Tehran. The deal has also been making China the pivot to the Middle East.

Fatima Karimkhan, a Tehran-based journalist, regards the deal as "one of the first steps for China in its way to find a more stable path in the Middle East".

The relative decline of the US in the Middle East paves the way for strengthening China's position in the region.

The Biden Administration seems to be following in the footsteps of his predecessors “pivot” away from the Middle East to Asia-Pacific region.

The US pivot to Asia-Pacific lucidly creates a vacuum for China that will leave no stone unturned to fill the void resulting in underpinning its foothold in the Middle East.

China is a leading trading partner and a pivotal ally in the region, providing sophisticated technologies and ammunition to the regional countries eroding the Indian influence by leaps and bounds. However, the deal under the umbrella of China brings Iran and Pakistan further closer.

China’s presence in Iran will considerably address security concerns of Pakistan emanating from Iran to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Needless to say, cordial ties between Islamabad and Tehran, by no means, serve New Delhi’s interest.

India’s lacklustre demeanour made it unsuccessful in construction of Iranian Chabahar port within stipulated time frame.

The Chabahar project witnessed recurrent adjournments, the project stopped twice in 2018 followed by 2019 that triggered Iran’s mistrust on India.

Experts contemplate that New Delhi is unable to handle an exerting pressure of the US will eat humble pie in construction of the Chabahar port.

India has resultantly been dropped from Chabahar port by its delayed funds, dropping India from Chabahar port reduces its access to Afghanistan and Central Asia invariably bolsters China’s position in the region.

Tehran will never forget a betrayal of New Delhi, when the latter tried to win the confidence of Washington, voted against the former in September 2005 in International Atomic Energy Agency session in the implementation of the non-proliferation treaty. Indian duplicity then opened the way to the US sanctions against Iran.

Geo-political landscape of the region in the emergence of rising China provides a golden opportunity to Iran to remove its isolation in the international arena, bolster fragile economy and to improve its tarnished image. In short, the deal further buttresses China's position in the Indian Ocean.

The 21st century is the Indian Ocean century; whoever dominates the Indian Ocean will, undeniably, dominate the world.

China's foothold in the Indian Ocean particularly in Gwadar and Chabahar ports as well as in the Strait of Hormuz would pose a huge challenge to the Indian interests.

—The writer is a Research Associate at India Study Centre, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/china-iran-strategic-deal-where-does-india-stand-by-dost-muhammad-barrech/>

# **What Future Holds For Palestinians? By**

## **Talat Masood**

When a country or a people engaged in a struggle for survival and asserting their rights undergo a mega crisis of the magnitude that was witnessed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the sufferings the latter bore, it is time to step back and take stock of what lies ahead. In short, the Palestinians have to assess the strength and weaknesses of their own and that of their mortal adversary who is determined to reduce them to an enslaved status.

This is not the last round or the end of the conflict. For the naked Israeli aggression against the Palestinians was not the first nor is it going to be the last. It is one episode of a long running war where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, overconfident with the country's military might and unlimited tacit support from major powers, will continue to wage. It is also a war that goes on in many different ways even when the guns are silent, by containment to weaken the adversary. The saddest, cruelest and the most highly unacceptable aspect of Israel's aggression is that it has a beginning but no end. Moreover, it does not consider or treat the Palestinians as normal citizens and brazenly defies all human and well-established behavioural norms. It has usurped Palestinian legal rights as citizens and indulges in prejudices that do not behove of civilised behaviour to say the least. What is most disappointing and tragic is that the United States and the West overlook these major policy aberrations for expedient gains. With advanced technology, military might and unquestioned support of Washington and the western countries, Israel has studiously planned to push the Palestinians from their land and that of their ancestors. This it has planned to execute by initially squeezing their living space, making existence unbearable by applying relentless pressure and abandoning the two-state solution.

True, not that long ago, Jews were subjected to the most inhuman treatment and even a genocide but not by Muslim countries but by the West. Regrettably, the focus of retaliation and pent-up hatred seems to be misdirected against the Palestinians. Of course, the Jews consider that they inhabited the land in the distant past but this is merely a dressing to justify its aggression. The same argument holds equally true for Palestinians, in fact, even more convincingly.

The most tragic aspect is that due to the acute differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran the Muslim countries are deeply divided. A few years ago, it would have been simply unimaginable that the Arabs would abandon the cause of the Palestinians and side with Israel or remain indifferent to their plight as the Arab-Iran confrontation has a higher strategic priority. Furthermore, most of the Middle Eastern kingdoms are politically, economically and militarily dependent on the West and cannot take positions that run counter to their immediate vested interests.

The support to Israel by the West serves multiple purposes due to their converging interests. Besides, the US is so engrossed with the Chinese rising threat that Palestine is more of a distraction and all it wants is that the conflict does not get out of control.

Another major factor that cannot be overlooked while assessing the Palestine-Israel conflict is the prevalence of prejudice against the Muslims in general at the global level. This applies not only to Christian countries but also countries like India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and many more. It is not surprising that whereas there were large-scale protests and condemnation in several western capitals but the protests were not that significant in these countries.

The Muslim leadership cannot absolve itself of the sharp and continuous decline in their collective voice, which is a consequence of its lagging behind in all critical features that define the progressive countries of the world today. Whether it be education, health or in the field of science and technology, or manufacturing civil or military hard or software, the Muslim countries with a few exceptions are heavily leaning on the US or China or Russia. Perhaps their decline is another reason for the world to exploit them so easily.

According to Nicholas Kristof, a highly respected journalist of The New York Times, Netanyahu, by being able to get support from evangelical Christians and to an extent from American Jews, has strengthened his hard line against Palestinians. It is nothing short of acute discrimination if not apartheid, if we dispassionately examine the treatment meted out to the Palestinians in the occupied territories. They are denied their fundamental rights in their own country. They are denied their right to vote, their lands are forcibly usurped and given away to Jewish settlers. In short it is the cruelest form of colonisation. And the other dark side of this saga is that seldom do the western or Muslim

countries, apart from a few exceptions, speak up and raise their concern. Unfortunately, the animosity of certain Arab rulers for Iran far outweighs their interests in Palestine. It seems that the Arab kingdoms consider Palestine a lost cause and a fait accompli. The divide within the Muslim countries is a blessing for Israel. The civil war in Syria and its adversarial relations with Saudi Arabia, the Shia-Sunni divide in Iraq and the Yemen civil war are pulling down these already battered countries and allowing Israel to dominate the region and deal with each of them individually. Iran does stand up against Israel and has been the main supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah. But the country is presently constrained by severe international sanctions and its adversarial relations with the US and Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan and Turkey have raised voice against Israel's aggression at the UNSC and other international forums but much more is needed to rescue and support the beleaguered Palestinians. Israel having inflicted severe damage on Gaza it would take years to recover and rebuild so an uneasy calm is likely to prevail. The question is: should this cycle of violence, followed by a lull, make the world shift its attention away from it until the next round with more fatalities and greater misery for the Palestinians?

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

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2301577/what-future-holds-for-palestinians>



# **Afghanistan at Crossroads By Abdul Hadi**

## **Mayar**

THE commencement of final withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan on 01 May 2021 has once again thrown Afghanistan into global limelight with speculations about future of the country and its government making rounds across the social and mainstream media.

Many analysts in the region and the West forecast the fall of Kabul government like a house of cards once the US troops' drawdown is completed.

However, these predictions are not in consonance with ground realities and developments taking place during the past several years.

Previously, the United States and Taliban had agreed to complete the troops' withdrawal process by May 1, 2021.

However, President Joe Biden announced on April 14 to begin the final drawdown by May 1 and complete it by 11 September this year – the 20th anniversary of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

As soon as Washington formally commenced the withdrawal process, the Taliban started incursions in different provinces of Afghanistan.

On April 30, 2021, a car bomb explosion killed 30 people in Pul-e-Alam, the capital of eastern Logar province.

Initially Taliban did not claim responsibility for the attack but later a Taliban official, in a video message, refuted the Afghan government's claim that victims of the attack were all students, counterclaiming that the targeted persons were military recruits.

Besides several other attacks against Afghan National Army (ANA) in parts of Afghanistan, the Taliban also ran over Baraka district in the northern Baghlan province, expelling the government forces from there.

Simultaneous with their military offensives, Taliban also unleashed an aggressive social media tirade, threatening government officials and even journalists covering the situation in Afghanistan.

Nemat Rawan, a journalist and television anchor, who had later joined Afghan Finance Ministry as communication specialist, was shot dead in Kandahar city on May 5.

Though no group had claimed responsibility for attack but a day earlier, the Taliban had warned journalists against 'biased reporting'.

Two massive bomb attacks did take place at a school and inside a mosque in Kabul city but both were attributed to ISIS as Taliban outrightly denied involvement in them.

Despite these initial gains of Taliban in the military field, a look at the events during the past six-year period after withdrawal of the bulk of US-NATO forces from Afghanistan shows that any expectation of the fall of Afghanistan into their hands after the final withdrawal would be a remote possibility.

The United States and NATO had announced completion of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission in December 2014 when 130,000 troops from over 40 allied countries returned from Afghanistan and security responsibility of the country was handed over to the Afghan National Army.

Only a 9600-strong Resolute Support Mission (RSM), comprising 2500 troops from the United States and 7100 from other NATO allied countries, was retained in the country with the sole TOR (terms of reference) to provide training, consultancy and assistance to ANA. The force was never meant for combat operations.

Ever since, the Afghan security forces are carrying out security responsibilities throughout Afghanistan.

Though Taliban and the other splinter Islamic militant groups have been carrying out guerrilla incursions, target attacks and bomb explosions – mostly in remote

rural areas – but they have not been able to gain any significant achievement during the last five and a half years.

Not even a single of the 34 provinces and 407 districts of Afghanistan are under the control of Taliban.

Afghan central, provincial and district governments are fully operative and all divisions and corps of the Afghan Army are in effective control.

Taliban do carry out attack, and even sometime briefly take district headquarters in far off rural areas but they are soon repulsed by Afghan government forces.

Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan do have its shadow governors and heads of different departments, like Justice, Education etcetera, for various provinces and districts but they neither sit in those centres, nor do they have offices there.

Most analyses predicting succumbing of Afghan government forces to Taliban are based on generalistic perceptions about the traditional Afghan Army.

Historically, Afghanistan has been lacking a disciplined regular army and its military forces have mostly comprised conscripts and tribal militias.

However, during the last two decades of US-NATO intervention, the country has developed a comparatively stronger and professional army.

Under the RSM, the 200,000-strong Afghan National Army has been adequately trained and equipped.

With the final drawdown of US forces already in place, it has inherited much of the over \$ two billion left over arms and equipment.

Beside their military disadvantage, the moral ground of the Taliban is also poised to get weaker after the withdrawal of the US forces.

The Islamic insurgents have all along claimed that their jihad is against the invading US-NATO troops.

Once these forces leave Afghanistan, they will be left with no moral justification to continue their jihad.

Much ground the Taliban have already lost by agreeing to hold talks with the United States and formally announcing not to attack the US forces while continuing operations against Afghan government forces.

For its part, the Kabul government must also not believe that every-thing is hunky-dory. Taliban own thousands of battle hardened fighters in all provinces of Afghanistan who are more trained in guerrilla warfare than the government troops.

They also possess squads of readily available suicide attackers anywhere they need.

With such a massive war machine, Taliban might give a tougher time to the government forces, even if they are not able to cause a massive dent to it.

In this situation, the only chance with the Afghan government and the Taliban is to shun war and violence and resolve their differences through peaceful political negotiations.

The saner elements among the Afghan groups will do better to grab the ground reality and save themselves and their country's people from further destruction.

Players in the region and the world also have to ensure their contribution and save this important region from further catastrophe.

Already has Afghanistan and the regional countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, have suffered incalculable losses due to war and violence in Afghanistan.

Further continuation and escalation of militancy and exacerbation of problems in Afghanistan will only add to the miseries of Afghanistan and the region, depriving the country of the emerging opportunities for economic development and trade.

—The writer is an Islamabad-based senior journalist, covering Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/afghanistan-at-crossroads-by-abdul-hadi-mayar/>

## **Iran Back in the Game | Editorial**

Iran's upward turn in regional fortunes looks set to reshape the Middle East as well as South Asia. And while this proves more than irksome to the US – Tehran enjoys the upper hand. All of which may be good news for Pakistan.

News of a tentative thawing of ties with Saudi Arabia was swiftly followed by some good old-fashioned Iranian hardball: limiting Houthi attacks on the Kingdom's oil facilities in exchange for the sale of Tehran's oil on world markets. If negotiated properly, including security guarantees for poverty-stricken Yemen, this would benefit the entire Middle East. While going some way to diminish the American policy of divide and conquer. Given that Pakistan enjoys close ties with both Riyadh and Tehran, it should offer to mediate between the two if needed. This will also be in keeping with Prime Minister Imran Khan's political stance on Yemen.

Naturally, the signing of the China-Iran strategic cooperation partnership back in March fuelled US fears that Tehran is in cahoots with Beijing to displace it as the traditional hegemon power in the Middle East. There may be some truth to this. But, in reality, the Chinese already secured entry into the Middle East by way of the Belt, Road Initiative (BRI). In addition, Beijing is Saudi Arabia's top economic trading partner and is a crucial investor in Israeli infrastructure.

Closer to home, Iran is already clipping American wings in South Asia and it is here that Pakistan stands to gain the most. Especially now that India has been 'removed' from the Chabahar Port project; following accusations that New Delhi had stalled on investment outlays at the US behest. If true, the move backfired given that Iran is now proposing to extend the existing CPEC corridor to from Pakistan's Gwadar Port to Chabahar and then use rail connectivity to take trade onwards to Central Asia and then Europe. This has the potential to turn the so-called golden ring – China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey – into the centrepiece of the BRI project.

An 'encircled' India may well try and implicate Pakistan in the inevitable blowback from Afghanistan following the US drawdown. Yet, so far, this seems unlikely. New Delhi has suffered enormously from the havoc wreaked by Covid-19 and is

focused on putting its own house in order. Indeed, it has expressed willingness to invest in Iran once sanctions are lifted and the 2015 nuclear deal revived.

There is no reason that regional economic connectivity cannot ensure peace and security far more effectively than the US in its role of self-proclaimed world's policeman. Bluntly put, recent developments have signalled to Washington that those heady days – whereby it was able to link hard cash injections to the selective championing of human rights – are on the wane. For just as China doesn't do gunboat diplomacy, it isn't interested in effecting regime change; much less on the false pretext of installing democracy.

New regional world orders are in the making. It remains up to the US to decide whether it wants to be part of them. Or stand against them. \*

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/760862/iran-back-in-the-game/>

# **Nuclear Nightmare: American Must Avoid War with Russia at All Costs** By **Kyle Mizokami**

Here's What You Need to Remember: While the threat of nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union has ended, the United States now faces the prospect of a similar war with Russia or China. The effects of a nuclear war in the twenty-first century would be no less severe.

It is no exaggeration to say that for those who grew up during the Cold War, all-out nuclear war was “the ultimate nightmare.” The prospect of an ordinary day interrupted by air-raid sirens, klaxons and the searing heat of a thermonuclear explosion was a very real, albeit remote, possibility. Television shows such as *The Day After* and *Threads* realistically portrayed both a nuclear attack and the gradual disintegration of society in the aftermath. In an all-out nuclear attack, most of the industrialized world would have been bombed back to the Stone Age, with hundreds of millions killed outright and perhaps as many as a billion or more dying of radiation, disease and famine in the postwar period.

During much of the Cold War, the United States’ nuclear warfighting plan was known as the SIOF, or the Single Integrated Operating Plan. The first SIOF, introduced in 1962, was known as SIOF-62, and its effects on the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact and China were documented in a briefing paper created for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and brought to light in 2011 by the National Security Archive. The paper presupposed a new Berlin crisis, similar to the one that took place in 1961, but escalating to full-scale war in western Europe.

Although the war scenario was fictional, the post-attack estimates were very real. According to the paper, the outlook for Communist bloc countries subjected to the full weight of American atomic firepower was grim. The paper divided attack scenarios into two categories: one in which the U.S. nuclear Alert Force, a percentage of overall nuclear forces kept on constant alert, struck the Soviet Union and its allies; and a second scenario where the full weight of the nuclear force, known as the Full Force, was used.



Under SIOP, “about 1,000” installations that were related to “nuclear delivery capability” would be struck. The scenario, which assumed advance warning of a Soviet attack and an American preemptive strike, would see the Alert Force attacking 75 percent of these targets. The attack would be a largely “counterforce” strike, in which U.S. nuclear forces attacked Soviet, Warsaw Pact and Chinese command-and-control and nuclear forces. The report states that 83 to 88 percent of all targets would be destroyed with 70 percent assurance.

In an Alert Force attack, 199 Soviet cities with populations of fifty thousand or greater would be struck. This would turn 56 percent of the urban population and 37 percent of the total population into casualties, most of whom would eventually die due to a post-attack breakdown of society. In China, forty-nine cities would be struck, turning 41 percent of the urban population into casualties and 10 percent of the overall population. In eastern Europe, only purely military targets would be struck, with a projected 1,378,000 killed by American nuclear attacks.

An all-out Full Force attack would be much worse. A Full Force attack would devastate 295 cities, leaving only five cities with populations of fifty thousand or more unscathed. 72 percent of the urban population and 54 percent of the overall population would become casualties—as the National Security Archive points out, that amounts to 108 million likely killed out of a total population of 217 million. In China, seventy-eight cities would be struck, affecting 53 percent of the urban population and 16 percent of the overall population. Casualties in eastern Europe would more than double, to 4,004,000.

Overall, an all-out U.S. attack on the Soviet Union, China and satellite countries in 1962 would have killed 335 million people within the first seventy-two hours.

The SIOP-62 report does not attempt to estimate U.S. casualties in a nuclear war. However, a 1978 report prepared for the Pentagon’s Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), “The Effects of Nuclear War,” spelled out in grim detail what would happen if the Soviet Union unleashed its arsenal on the United States.

The OTA report states that, in the event of a Soviet attack against U.S. nuclear forces, other military targets, economic targets and population targets, an attack could be estimated to kill between sixty and eighty-eight million Americans. With enough warning, major cities and industrial areas could be evacuated, but that would only lower the number of dead to between fifty-one and forty-seven million.

Attacks on U.S. allies, including the NATO nations, Japan and South Korea, would undoubtedly occur but are not modelled in the study.

Another report, “Casualties Due to the Blast, Heat, and Radioactive Fallout from Various Hypothetical Nuclear Attacks on the United States,” postulated a Soviet attack against “1,215 U.S. strategic-nuclear targets. The attack involves almost 3,000 warheads with a total yield of about 1,340 megatons.” Because the attacks are carried out against hardened facilities, particularly MX and Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic-missile silos, the attacks are envisioned using SS-18 “Satan” ICBMs, each carrying ten 550-to-750-kiloton warheads. Attacks against U.S. bomber and refueling forces are carried out by ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles fired from off the coastline.

The result of even this modest attack, which largely spares U.S. cities to attack nuclear forces in the Midwest, is thirteen to thirty-four million deaths and twenty-five to sixty-four million total casualties. Still, bombarded by 1,215 nukes, the United States would lose far fewer people than Strategic Air Command estimated the Soviet Union would lose in 1962.

The discrepancy is probably because of the larger yields of U.S. nuclear weapons in the 1960s versus Soviet nukes in the 1980s, but also because at the time of the SAC report, Soviet nuclear forces were primarily bomber-based. The Soviet Union had between 300 and 320 nuclear weapons in 1962, all but forty of which were bomber-based. Bomber bases may have been closer to major population areas. A major draw of U.S. nuclear weapons to Soviet cities would have also been the presence of local airports, which would have functioned as dispersal airfields for nuclear-armed bombers. On the other hand, the Soviet attack would largely hit ICBM fields and bomber bases in low-population-density regions of the Midwest, plus a handful of submarine bases on both coasts.

As devastating as these projections are, all readily admit they don’t tell the entire story. While these three studies model the immediate effects of a nuclear attack, long-term problems might kill more people than the attack itself. The destruction of cities would deny the millions of injured, even those who might otherwise easily survive, even basic health care. What remains of government—in any country—would be hard pressed to maintain order in the face of dwindling food and energy supplies, a contaminated landscape, the spread of disease and

masses of refugees. Over a twelve-month period, depending on the severity of the attack, total deaths attributable to the attacks could double.

While the threat of nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union has ended, the United States now faces the prospect of a similar war with Russia or China. The effects of a nuclear war in the twenty-first century would be no less severe. The steps to avoiding nuclear war, however, are the same as they were during the Cold War: arms control, confidence-building measures undertaken by both sides and a de-escalation of tensions.

Kyle Mizokami is a defense and national-security writer based in San Francisco who has appeared in the Diplomat, Foreign Policy, War is Boring and the Daily Beast. In 2009 he cofounded the defense and security blog Japan Security Watch. You can follow him on Twitter: @KyleMizokami. This article is being republished due to reader interest.

Source: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/nuclear-nightmare-american-must-avoid-war-russia-all-costs-187019>