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PAKISTAN

Impacts of Climate Change By Zile Huma

Climate Change is a multi-disciplinary area interlinked with many other fields, like food and agriculture, health, economy, water issues, disaster management and gender perspective. The role of women in climate change cannot be undermined due to their greater risks of susceptibility to climate change disasters. Pakistan is among top ten countries most affected by climate change, thus making its females more vulnerable to climate change risks. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of females in Pakistan is 48.76 percent as compared to 51 percent of men according to census 2017. This means that females comprises almost half population of Pakistan and equally prone to climate change disasters. Under the undocumented economy of Pakistan, many women in rural areas are associated with agricultural and livestock work, providing their families' livelihood. The floods and droughts caused by climate change demolish crops, negatively impacting the livelihood of women.

The 2010-14 floods in Pakistan caused monetary losses of over 18 millions dollars, affected 38.12 million people, damaged 3.45 houses and destroyed 10.63 millions acre crops. The damages to crops and livestock also creates food security in the country, affecting the health of women in form of malnutrition during pregnancy and after childbirth. The women in Northern areas are dependent upon wood from forests in winter for cooking purposes and keeping them warm because many Northern areas lack facilities like gas and renewable energy resources. Thus, increasing deforestation that is main cause of global warming and climate change.

Climate Change is creating water shortage in our already water-restrained country, creating additional burden on rural women of Pakistan who fetch water from far off areas for domestic use. In the patriarchal society, financial problems due to climate change disasters lead to tensions in families and increase domestic violence against women. Similarly in rural areas, women are considered responsible for bringing up their children and domestic chores. There are many health issues caused by climate change in Pakistan like respiratory and eye infections due to smog. Not too long ago, heatwave in Karachi took lives of almost 2000 people.

The diseases like malaria and dengue are temperature and rain sensitive and may increase due to climate change. The hot temperature is a condition for breeding and survival of dengue mosquito that is currently a major challenge in the province of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The women in Pakistan who are charged with the responsibility of taking care of ill family members are further over-burdened due to these health issues caused by climate change.

Pakistan has a significant representation of women parliamentarians from disaster prone areas. Women parliamentarians can play an active role in mobilising local women for disaster preparedness

All sustainable development goals are directly or indirectly related to goal 13 that is climate action. The goal number 5 called 'gender equality' also have a very important role in achieving targets of goal 13 'climate action'. First it's very important to realise at all levels that women are at greater risks of climate change impacts. Pakistan is a signatory to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The need to improve women's participation in negotiations was also recognised by Conference of Parties 7 held in Marrakech. The Paris agreement somewhat reflects the importance of gender equality: the preamble talks about gender equality and empowerment of women. Adaptation and capacity building articles in Paris agreement include that action must be gender-responsive; and implementation of the decision is meant to take into account gender balance. So the needs of women vulnerable to climate change should be catered to under international commitments as well.

The government of Pakistan has taken various initiatives at policy level to include gender perspective separately like Climate Change Policy 2012, National Sanitation Policy 2006. There is a separate cell called Gender Child Cell working under National Disaster Management Authority. But there should be more practical steps to include the women in mainstream decision-making process. Pakistan is a country having significant representation of women parliamentarians from disaster prone areas. The female parliamentarians can play an active role to mobilise local women for disaster preparedness. There should be a specific funding in every project on climate change, allocated from gender perspective. A significant representation of women in all decision-making bodies of climate change at governmental and non-governmental level is also needed. Women must be

included in delegations representing Pakistan at International forums on climate change as well.

The writer is based in Islamabad and works on environmental issues. She can be reached at zilehuma_1@hotmail.com

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Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/133313/impacts-climate-change/>

Protection of National Interests | Editorial

FOREIGN Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif held out an assurance to the Senate on Wednesday that national interests would be protected while maintaining ties with the United States. Commenting on recent visit of the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Pakistan, he said the United States has been conveyed that instead of indulging in empty talks it should instead share feasible information on intelligence matters.

The statement comes in the wake of a statement made by the US Secretary of State before a Congressional panel in Washington that his country would give Pakistan a chance to strike terrorist targets. Statements of both the leaders indicate that the two countries have agreed on a mechanism for cooperation i.e. the US would provide actionable intelligence and ground action would be taken by Pakistan. This is in line with repeated demand of Pakistan that the United States should not violate sovereignty of the country through drone attacks and instead provide timely information for action by Pakistani forces. Pakistan demonstrated its capability to meet the challenge when its forces successfully and safely recovered the US-Canadian family. This is the most appropriate way to deal with the common threat of terrorism, as unilateral actions by the United States have been a source of resentment in Pakistan. If there are terrorists moving around in Pakistani territory and the United States provides timely information there is no reason for Pakistan not to take action when its armed forces are engaged in a comprehensive cleanup operation against all sorts of terrorists. But all this should be in a cooperative environment and not through coercive means and we hope Tillerson got the message during his visit. We also expect our policy and decision makers not to fall flat under pressure and hold national interests supreme in all circumstances. There is also logic in the remarks of the Foreign Minister that the United States might not be there in Afghanistan tomorrow but Pakistan would be there to face the consequences of any turmoil in that country, therefore, it is in the interest of Islamabad to seek solution of the problem through regional cooperation.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/protection-national-interests/>

Indo-US-Afghan Nexus And Pakistan By Moonis Ahmar

Addressing a gathering at the Vivekananda International Foundation in New Delhi on October 25, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani ruled out his country's participation in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) unless Kabul is given access to Wagah crossing on the Indo-Pak border for its trade with New Delhi. He threatened to block Pakistan's access to Central Asia if his country's demand for a land entry via Pakistan for trade with India is not granted. Earlier, the Afghan President lauded Donald Trump's new policy on South Asia as a 'game changer' and welcomed India's new role in Afghanistan.

The possibility of Indo-US-Afghan nexus is not superficial but real as American tilt towards India and Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon. Since quite long, particularly after Trump's election as president, growing Indo-US-Afghan understanding on dealing with what they perceive terrorist safe havens in the tribal areas of Pakistan tends to raise serious concerns in Islamabad.

Indo-US nexus is also talked about in terms of growing defence cooperation and dealing with China and Pakistan. But, if US-Indo-Afghan nexus is in offing, it would mean three major implications for Pakistan. First, deepening of strategic pressure on Pakistan as its two major neighbours and a global superpower will coordinate their policies to further limit time, space and options for Islamabad.

After concluding his week-long visit to Europe, Middle East and South Asia, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made it clear that, "Pakistan is a key partner for the stability of the region. We have a long history of positive partnership with Pakistan, but Pakistan should do more to eradicate militants and terrorists operating within its country."

Indo-US-Afghan nexus would further deepen Pakistan's dependence on China and to lesser extent on Russia for meeting its defence needs. In an interview to Arab News on October 9, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi made it clear that his country will diversify the sources of its defence needs instead of remaining dependent on the United States by seeking Chinese, Russian and European sources of defence equipment.

It is yet to be seen how far and to what extent the military establishment of Pakistan can distance itself from the United States. Since early 1950s till the recent past, military to military relations between Pakistan and the US remained on a strong footing as Islamabad, albeit phases of rupture, remained a major recipient of American military aid and training.

The Afghan allegations against Pakistan continue unabated despite the goodwill which was created as a result of the visit of Chief of Army Staff to Kabul last month and the recent four-tier talks among Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States in Oman

Furthermore, it is not only the matter of Pak-US defence cooperation since the day of alliances till the post-9/11 Pakistan's tilt towards American led war on terror, the interests of civilian elites including bureaucracy and politicians also clicked with Washington as America provided them 'safe haven' in the form of good quality of life and better opportunities for them and their children. And it is not only the United States which promises a 'safe haven' to the elites of Pakistan, but it is the entire West which provides the elites of Pakistan, like many of the counterparts in the third world countries, opportunities for a better present and future life.

In view of the ground realities, it is rightly asked by those who question the rationale of periodic assertions by Pakistani political, bureaucratic and military circles about their defiance with the US the contradiction in theory and practice of their so-called anti-US and anti-West rhetoric. Third, age-old American influence in Pakistan means that the US has access to the individuals and institutions involved in formulating and designing what the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Chief of Army Staff assert a policy of not acquiescing to American pressure of 'doing more' to eradicate 'safe havens' of alleged terrorist networks in Pakistan.

In a hard hitting speech which he delivered in the Senate of Pakistan in a briefing session on October 26, Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif made it clear that, "we have not succumbed to the threat made by Trump from Fort Myer. We stood tall and will keep the posture before any power of the world. We are ready to help them, but will not become their proxy."

One can appreciate what the Foreign Minister stated in his Senate briefing about Pakistan not becoming proxy of the US and his severe criticism on the past regimes who used to hand over suspects to the United States for dollars, but how far the present regime of Pakistan, no matter how defiant it is, can restore respect, sovereignty and integrity is yet to be seen.

In view of strategic consensus which exists between India, United States and Afghanistan on the alleged existence of 'safe havens' of terrorist networks in Pakistan, and Islamabad's denial of American-Indian and Afghan allegations, there is a remote possibility of any transformation in the existing standoff between Pakistan on the one hand and Washington-New Delhi and Kabul on the other.

Surprisingly, the Afghan allegations against Pakistan continue unabated despite the goodwill which was created as a result of the visit of Chief of Army Staff to Kabul last month and the recent holding of four tier talks among Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States in Muscat, Oman. Kabul's hard line stance on Pakistan has become more visible after Tillerson's visit to Afghanistan and the holding of talks between the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It means that the pressure on Pakistan by the three countries that want Islamabad to follow their line of action on Afghanistan and regional security concerns particularly on terrorism is deepening.

For Pakistan, it is like a devil and a deep blue like situation: sandwiched between unfriendly India and Afghanistan and unabated American pressure to weed out what it calls the infrastructure of terrorist and militant groups, the only viable option is to put its own house in order by focusing of human and social development; eradication of corruption, nepotism, extremism, intolerance, radicalisation, militancy, violence and terrorism from society. Good governance, effective justice system and the rule of law will also go a long way in pulling Pakistan out of multiple crisis like economic, political and the crisis situation as far as the Indo-US-Afghan nexus is concerned.

Published in Daily Times, November 3rd 2017.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/133771/indo-us-afghan-nexus-pakistan/>

Threatening Pakistan Won't Work By M Tahir Iqbal

THE sonority of Rex Tillerson's words is quite palpable here in Pakistan. Tillerson, the US Secretary of State, has been to his South Asian trip. During his short sojourn at the tightly secured and the US controlled Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan, he demands Pakistan to move against the Taliban and other extremists based inside its borders or 'face the consequences'. Pakistan is also reactive this time – least in the mood to listen to the hackneyed rhetoric of 'doing more' since it avows to have done much more to eliminate the 'agents of chaos'. The officials here contend that it is the only country in the world that is giving the toughest fight to the terrorists on its land. In so doing, it suffered heavy losses – economically, culturally, socially and in the form of mass civilian and military casualties. Standing strong and tall on his feet, Pakistan's FM Khawaja Asif says that there shall be no compromise or surrender this time.

The American boots reached Afghanistan some 16 years ago with three lucid targets: 'to exterminate the brutes' in the words of Joseph Conrad, of Al-Qaeda who played havoc at twin towers of New York and then Pentagon, to do away with the Taliban that kept close ties with the members of Al-Qaeda, and the third aim appeared a bit later and that was not to leave Afghanistan in chaos after the extirpation of Al-Qaeda affiliates and the Taliban, rather helping Afghan nation to stand strong politically and socially. Pity that not a single objective is achieved even after the elapse of 16 years in Afghanistan. Even after spending \$1 trillion in Afghanistan and the presence of 11000 American troops, Tillerson cannot take the risk of being outside of highly fortified Bagram Airfield and reach Kabul – that clearly speaks volumes of the chagrins the US has been picking from its longest ever war on an alien land.

But there is anger and fury against Pakistan ever since Donald Trump reached the corridors of power; and that has been gaining considerable crescendo in recent times. The policy makers in the US Congress and Pentagon know that not a single ounce of success they ever reaped in Afghanistan, so Pakistan has to be made scapegoat for the US failures in Afghanistan. If accepted the argument, Pakistan nurtures Afghan Taliban as proxy in Afghanistan, what on earth are the US-led forces stationed there for? Still 45% area of Afghanistan is under the Taliban's

influence despite efforts to hold democratic and political sway. Moreover, there have emerged other regional players having ties with the Taliban.

The heap of collective failures cannot be piled over Pakistan. There are other indicators too for the decadence of Afghanistan, terrorism being one of them. Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt countries on this glob, standing at 169 out of 176 according to Transparency International. Almost all institutions are in disarray: Afghan national army, police, custom, education, judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, to name a few. In another article, 'America keeps on failing in Afghanistan', published lately in Washington Post, Ronald E. Neumann opines, "In theory, US strategy in Afghanistan has been to train an Afghan army that can fight al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and now the Islamic State — and then largely to withdraw. After 16 years, it's not surprising that many people think that strategy has failed. In fact, it hasn't really been tried." There is a general understanding in Pakistan that the recent sullen melodies exuding from Washington are composed in Indian riffs. The US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis' recent diatribe that CPEC is passing through the disputed territory gives credence to the theory. Then the US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley says that India can help the United States in keeping an eye on Pakistan. This is here the US has been at fault in Afghanistan. Hunting solution to Afghanistan's problems bypassing Pakistan's key role, and endowing a bigger part to India will by no means serve the purpose. Pakistan has only one concern: the predominant Indian presence on Afghan soil is the biggest threat to peace in Pakistan. India from Afghan soil keeps ties with the ragtag groups of extremists and separatists like TTP, BLA, BRA to foment insurgency in FATA, Karachi, Balochistan and elsewhere in Pakistan.

Many Indian writers now covertly and overtly confess that India uses Afghan's soil to fan insurgencies in Pakistan. On 21st of September, Hindustan Times published a piece written by Bharat Karnad, a professor for national security studies at the Centre for Policy Research. Mr Karnad acknowledges in the article, "Mattis' request that India moderate its support for TTP will put Delhi in a fix because TTP is useful as an Indian counterpart of the Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, and Jaish-e-Mohammad deployed by the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Jammu & Kashmir. Severing relations with TTP will mean India surrendering an active card in Pakistan and a role in Afghanistan." If the workable solution to Afghanistan's woes is to be devised, Pakistan has to be engaged and its concerns have to be addressed while repudiating Lisa-Haqqani philosophy. Furthermore, it

has to be understood that Afghanistan carries multi-pronged complications – all those have to be addressed and redressed. Disgorging Indian-suffused rancour and threats against Pakistan will not find a way through.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/threatening-pakistan-wont-work/>

Gaping Gender Gap | Editorial

The World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Index was released on Thursday and it ranks Pakistan 143 out of 144 countries.

Pakistan has remained on the same level since 2012 — one spot ahead of Yemen — and the gender gap has widened consistently since 2006. The index measures equality in terms of educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.

The figures are reflective of apathy on the part of successive governments to improve the stigmas and mindsets regarding women. The number of obstructions faced by women in every sphere of life is phenomenal — these figures only attest that.

Only a few weeks ago, a bill to change the legal age for women's marriage from 16 to 18 was turned down by the legislature.

Though the recent launch of a special court for dealing with women's issues in Lahore is a step forward, the need of the hour is to start discussing how to transform state institutions as a whole so that women don't face discrimination.

The government may consider creating a women's task force with membership from women activists in political parties and civil society organisations to ensure gender equality in the society. We must learn from the examples from other developing countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Japan. Important to note is how Bangladesh ranks at number 50 on the Index, the highest in South Asia. Pakistan could take many cues from Bangladesh for improving gender equality.

Some measures have been taken by the provincial government in Punjab. A women's empowerment task force was formed in 2012 which increased the women's job quota for jobs from 5 percent to 15 percent in the public sector. The government has also introduced Rs 9.2 billion for implementing the recommendations on the Punjab Gender Parity Report.

Despite these measures, there appears to be a thorough lack of visible change for women. Public spaces are still inherently male dominated, and women face

discrimination on countless fronts. It is time the government began showing a commitment to improving the conditions for women across the country.

Women's empowerment is an essential part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The WEF's figures should be an impetus to improve the gender gap in Pakistan. *

Published in Daily Times, November 6th 2017.

Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/134795/gaping-gender-gap/>

Going Without A Water Policy By Mohiuddin Aazim

AS Pakistan heads towards water scarcity, promoting economic use of water has become as important as boosting renewable resources.

In agriculture, the concept of economising the usage of water gained currency about a decade ago. But in the absence of a national water policy, efforts made for conserving water have so far not made a major impact.

By 2014, Pakistan had withdrawn 94 per cent of its total renewable water resources. Water withdrawal for agriculture had also reached 94pc of the total available resources for this sector, according to the 2015 yearbook of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Gauged by the production index of 100 (with base year 2004-06), net food availability stood at 94 and net output of crops at 107, according to the FAO. The gap indicates the level of post-harvest losses and weaknesses in value-addition chain of food crops.

The measuring of net output of crops at 107 at an index of 100 despite 94pc water withdrawal for agriculture means “we are producing less food with more water”, says an official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. This highlights the need for economising water use on the one hand and boosting crops’ yield on the other.

On farms and fields that get water from canal networks, efficient water management depends largely on improving water courses, using laser land levelling, bed and furrow irrigation, gated pipe irrigation, pressurised irrigation, and acquiring best practices for groundwater extraction and distribution.

Pakistan is still awaiting its first national water policy despite the fact that its draft was formulated in 2003, whereas India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka all have their policies in place for more than a decade

Things have improved in the past decade, chiefly due to increased governmental spending, but also because of some investment made by large farm owners, such as in gated pipe irrigation and pressurised irrigation.

In deserts and in areas not fed by canals, water efficiency can be achieved through water harvesting and on-farm storage, pressurised irrigation, tunnel farming, and plasticulture, i.e. the use of plastic materials in the irrigation system and other agriculture applications.

This is where Pakistan is lagging far behind others, mainly due to the absence or dearth of government funding and coordinated investment by the private sector.

During the past 10 years, a number of tunnel farms have sprung up in Punjab and in Sindh, but promoting tunnel farming on a large scale requires policy vision and kick-starting public-private partnership projects, experts say.

Last month, the Punjab government initiated a programme to provide 50pc subsidy on the installation of tunnel farming infrastructure on 3,000 acres of land. The provincial government is already giving a subsidy of up to 60pc on the installation of drip irrigation systems.

In August, the Sindh government unveiled a massive \$185m World Bank-funded Sindh Irrigated Agricultural Productivity Enhancement project to promote drip irrigation across the province over a period of six years.

In Balochistan a \$100m, ADB-funded water resource development project is under way. It will be used not only for constructing new dams, but also for flood irrigation or spate system of water supply, officials say.

The spate system is useful in the areas where farmers don't have access to ordinary canal water and, instead, manipulate water flows of seasonal floods in rivers and streams to temporary canals or water ways to use in farms and fields.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, authorities have been trying to use the gravity flow of irrigation system with financial help from the federal government to divert rainwater and store it at a higher altitude area and then channel it back to lower altitude areas for use on farms and fields.

Pakistan needs more of the above-cited initiatives to bridge the gap between growing demand and scarce supply of water for agriculture. For this year's Rabi crop, a water emergency has already been declared after authorities came to know that shortage of water can shoot up to 40pc, double the initial estimate of 20pc, recent media reports suggest.

Meanwhile, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) wants the government to come up with the much-awaited national water policy to ensure efficient water management in the future. The central bank recently suggested that there is a need to connect water pricing to the actual amount of water consumed by a crop or an area.

The SBP's annual report for the 2016-17 fiscal year contains a comprehensive special report on water management that suggests various other measures.

The report laments the fact that Pakistan is still awaiting its first national water policy despite the fact that its draft was formulated in 2003, whereas India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka all have their water policies in place for more than a decade.

The task of structuring our national water policy became more complicated after the 18th Amendment to the Constitution under which water distribution for agriculture, domestic and industrial purposes became a provincial subject. The draft water policy now awaits approval from the Council of Common Interests.

A delay in announcing the water policy "is a major setback as the current policies are inadequate in addressing the upcoming water challenges", warns the SBP report. "Further delays would only damage the long-term growth prospects of the economy."

The report also calls for introducing water rights system wherein head-end farmers — the ones who are entitled to use a certain amount of water but their needs are low at a particular time of the year — could sell their water rights to tail-end farmers, who at that time need more water than their quota.

This should help improve the most efficient use of water and boost agricultural output.

Published in Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, November 6th, 2017

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1368724/going-without-a-water-policy>

Improving Pak-Iran Ties: A Game Changer By Sheraz Zaka

There was a time when the relations between Iran and Pakistan were cordial. In 1947 Iran was the first country to recognise Pakistan as an independent country. King Raza Shah Pahlavi was the first foreign leading dignitary to pay a state visit to Pakistan. Both countries were members of SEATO.

The cultural links between both the countries were also quite strong. This eventually led to the formation of RCD (Regional Cooperation Development). In 1979 Pakistan was the first country to give recognition to the revolutionary regime of Ayatollah Khomeini after the Shah's regime was brought to an end. But with the passage of time, relations between both countries soured.

However in 2017, both states were brought closer as a result of Donald Trump's shenanigans. Trump thinks that by pressurising Pakistan with his do-more demands in Afghanistan, he will be able to win the fight against the Afghan Taliban. On 21 August, he delivered a speech in which he employed particularly aggressive rhetoric against Pakistan.

He did not consider that even according to conservative estimates, Pakistan has lost tens of thousands of lives fighting against terrorism. At his UNGA speech on Iran, Trump called the nuclear deal with Iran "one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into" and signalled that America may soon pull out of the deal. This is despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and European Union (EU) are in favour of concluding an agreement on nuclear energy with Iran.

Over the past few years there has been a debate in Pakistan that due to the increasing US pressure on Pakistan, it would be prudent to develop friendly ties with other countries while also keeping geopolitical realities in consideration. The country has already made a massive diplomatic shift towards Beijing and Moscow. Improving relations with Iran can also be of great strategic importance for us.

Over the past few years, it was seen that Iran and India were developing friendly ties but that ended when India voted against Iran in the IAEA as a result of US pressure. Meanwhile, diplomatic relations between India and Israel are improving

Similarly, once Trump took oath as president, relations between Iran and the US became tenser. Iran's influence in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain has already been called very dangerous by the current US regime. The progress made by former President Barrack Obama in concluding an agreement with Iran on nuclear power has been greatly nullified and undermined by Trump.

This gives Pakistan and Iran an opportunity to form a strong bond and cooperate on various issues, especially energy. Iran is rich in oil and gas reserves and when the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline is eventually completed, Pakistan would be enabled to produce electricity at low tariffs. This would also benefit China if the pipeline can also make its way to Xinjiang. Diplomatic hostilities from the US have already brought the two countries closer together than they have been in decades. Balochistan is also a factor here, since both the countries' geopolitical rivals wouldn't want peace in Balochistan. Therefore, cooperation between Pakistan and Iran is also highly important if the situation in Balochistan is to be improved.

This cooperation between both states can be two-fold: one is the implementation of border controls and the other is on keeping checks and balances on the smuggling of narcotics. In this respect both countries' intelligence agencies should engage in information-sharing regularly in order to clamp down on such illegal activities.

It should not be forgotten that during 1990s both the countries had developed differences on the Afghan-policy issue, which affected relations between them after the government of Pakistan recognised the Taliban's government. At present, Iran's government is of the view that the volatile situation in Afghanistan cannot be improved unless or until the Taliban are made a part of the political process as 45 percent of Afghanistan is controlled by the Taliban. It is a reality that without engaging the Taliban politically, the Afghanistan cannot be resolved. Both Pakistan and Iran have to play an instrumental role in this regard.

Over the past few years, it was seen that Iran and India were developing friendly ties but that ended when India voted against Iran in the IAEA as a result of US

pressure. In return India got a nuclear agreement from the US. As a result, Iran learnt that India is not a reliable partner and it also knows that the present Indian government is no friend of the Muslim community. This was an eye-opener for both the Iran and Pakistan. Meanwhile, diplomatic relations between India and Israel are improving.

Recent statements from Iran's foreign ministry in favour of Pakistan regarding Kashmir should be welcomed. With the changing geo-strategic scenario it has become vital for both states to bring their relationship closer to what they were in the 1960s as it would be beneficial for people on both sides. This could also be an instrumental factor in uniting Islamic world

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Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/135258/improving-pak-iran-ties-game-changer/>

Society And Foreign Policy By Khurram Minhas

SINCE its independence, major objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy have remained fluctuated. Though, there are some constants such as efforts to keep close cooperation with the US, deep security assurances for Saudi Arabia in Middle East, and highlighting Kashmir dispute at international forums. However, over the years many approaches have been replaced during this evolutionary process in the foreign policy depending upon the ground realities and regional or international strategic environment. Excessive reliance on the US has been replaced with China, aggression against India has been replaced with pragmatic approach of unceasing appeals for dialogue, and perhaps most importantly struggles of creating balanced foreign policy between Riyadh and Tehran has taken unprecedented pace.

Recently, Pakistan's foreign policy as a state is revolving around six major interests including softening its international image, enhancing exports and access to major markets, internationalizing Kashmir dispute, improving regional connectivity which is pegged with regional security and stability, and developing cordial relations with major powers (particularly with the US). These are the preferences of Pakistani state institutions and intelligentsia. Visit of Pakistan's Foreign Minister to the US, participation in Quad lateral Cooperation Group (QCG), offering connectivity of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to neighbouring states, robust and unceasing multidimensional military operations against terrorists, and offering mediation between Riyadh and Tehran, are some manifestations of above mentioned objective of Pakistan's foreign policy.

On the contrary, the society has different preferences. For a common Pakistani, America, Israel and India are responsible for every social, economic and security related issue in the country. Generally, the society has pegged various types of perceptions with different regions, which has largely affected the foreign policy of the country or developed sensitivities. For Pakistani society, Middle East is most sacred region and security of Saudi Arabia is responsibility of every Muslim, without considering any repercussion. This approach somehow has hemmed in Pakistani institutions and intelligentsia, which is nearly impossible to be removed in recent future.

Likewise, Europe has been assuming as most favourite destination of elite class since Pakistan's inception. European region has high standards of human rights, democracy, etc and Pakistan often comes short to meet these European high standards. Few Pakistanis know how that many countries are in Central Asia. Hence, despite many economic and strategic opportunities lying in Central Asia, the country has been neglecting true potential of Central Asian region. South East Asia is Pakistani elite's attractive destination for spending holidays and for religious hawks it is the attractive region to spread Islam. Hence, despite the overwhelming potential of trade with ASEAN region, Pakistan is facing more than five billion dollars trade deficit with the region. On the other hand, thanks to efforts of religious extremists, many societies of ASEAN region have started considering Pakistani religious class responsible for growing Islamic extremism in the region.

The aspiration of converting non-Muslims into Muslims, efforts to make Muslims as 'Good Muslims', rising anti-American hatred, lack of sense of co-existence in society have created numerous problem for the country to achieve its desired objectives. Pakistan's relentless efforts for internationalisation of Kashmir dispute at every international forum and often get wasted due to a single statement of religious fanatic when they portray it 'Kashmir Jihad'.

One can observe a clear split between state and society over the foreign policy preferences of the country. On the one hand, a growing realization among the educated youth is perpetuating to see Pakistan's own house in order, while on the other hand, hawkish elements and religious fanatics eager to witness an aggressive rhetoric against India, America and perhaps against Iran. Pakistan has been trying for long and perhaps needs to continue its struggle to form a delicate balance between societal aspirations and pragmatic approaches for long term interest of the country. Most importantly, the state needs to create awareness in the society in order to ease its difficulties at foreign fronts. Though, quantum leaps have been taken by Pakistani educated youth in recent years through social media for spreading information about Pakistan's foreign policy and Pakistan's interests, yet there is a long road to go. It is hoped that the proliferation of social media, active civil society and concerned academia will promote the message of national interest and the hawkish voices will dry out gradually.

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Fix The Energy Mix By Hasaan Khawar

The recent news of merging the Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB) with the Private Power Infrastructure Board came as a surprise. With the bulk of new investments in the power sector geared towards fossil fuel generation, are we losing our focus on alternative energy?

Pakistan's electricity generation mix, as depicted in the recent Economic Survey, was 64% thermal, 30% hydro and 6% nuclear. Alternative energy, owing to its minuscule size, became a rounding error. Looking at the most recent Central Power Purchasing Agency data, we generated 112,000+ GWh of electricity in the last 12 months, out of which gas, Regasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) and furnace oil together accounted for almost 60% generation, while hydel contributed 27%. Renewable energy, including solar, wind and bagasse, accounted for less than 3% of this mix.

In comparison, in India these alternative sources contribute almost 15% to electricity generation. India has solar, wind and biomass generation installed capacity of 50,000+ MW, which is the double of our entire installed capacity. The proportion of global electricity coming from renewable sources was more than 11% in 2016.

Why is the world embracing renewable energy? Keeping the clean energy argument aside, let's look at the costs. It may be useful to look at levelised tariffs, which provide average cost estimates over the project life.

The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's (Nepa) benchmark tariff for wind projects was set at 6.7 cents in 2017, for competitive bidding reflecting the upper cap. This is likely to settle between 5-6 cents. Only six years ago, Nepa gave an upfront tariff of 14.66 cents per KWh, showing the massive price decline due to advances in technology. Solar technology has shown an even greater drop. Although Nepa has not given any benchmark tariff, recently the Norwegian company Scatec Solar requested levelised tariff of less than six cents, 37% lower than the tariff proposed in 2016.

Looking at international trends, these costs are likely to drop significantly in the future. Masdar recently submitted the world's cheapest bid for a 300MW solar

power project in Saudi Arabia at 1.79 US cents per KWh, while Turkey recently offered 3.48 cents per unit of feed-in tariff for wind energy.

Tariffs for fossil fuel electricity can't seem to match these rapidly dropping rates. The choicest technology in Pakistan presently seems to be RLNG, furnace oil (FO) and coal, while using HSD wherever essential. Even if we consider the most recent rates, they respectively stand at 6.75, 7.33 and 10+ cents per KWh, looking at Thar coal upfront tariff, Punjab Thermal Power Limited and other sources. Even the run-of-the-river projects seeking levelised tariffs of 9+ cents don't make sense in the wake of much cheaper wind and solar choices.

These differences of few cents can make a great deal of financial impact. For instance, each cent of tariff difference translates into \$1-1.4 billion every year for our entire power generation base. Last year, FO contributed approximately 28% to the mix. Had it come from a solar-powered source, it alone would have saved us \$1+ billion. Moreover, the cost of fuel is generally a pass-through item, meaning that any increases in the price of oil will be added and the tariff would swell. We all know that oil prices have been depressed for long and they are likely to rise in the years to come.

Interestingly, we have immense unexplored solar potential whereas in the case of wind, the months of high wind speed seem to be perfectly aligned with our peak demand periods. The argument here is not to abandon RLNG and FO altogether but instead to use the existing fossil fuel-based capacity as a base load and change the mix with increased proportion of alternative sources.

Other countries have done that successfully. Germany, for instance, meets almost all of its domestic electricity demand through renewables at particular times of the year. Similarly, China boasts having the largest renewable energy capacity of 500+ GW. No wonder in 2016, 55% of the total power generation capacity added worldwide came from renewable sources and installation of new renewable capacity of 138.5 GW which became a new record.

Why then are we not witnessing this trend in Pakistan? Do we have investment constraints? Interestingly, Pakistan is now considered an increasingly attractive market for investment in renewable energy. Pakistan figured nowhere in the E&Y's

Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index in 2015 but rose to 38th position in 2016 and 26th in 2017.

However, attractiveness alone is not enough. To capitalise on this, we need to undertake renewable projects at a much larger scale, backed by strong institutional capacity. India has a dedicated ministry of new and renewable energy since 1992. Australia, the US and many other countries have dedicated agencies for renewable energy with varying roles. Germany also largely owes its success with renewables to the advocacy role played by the German Renewable Energies Agency.

Pakistan's electricity consumption of roughly 540 KWh per capita is five times less than the world average of 2,700+ KWh. We have a long way to go in meeting our future energy needs. It is high time that we developed a dedicated focus on fixing our energy mix and initiated a transition towards renewable energy. This will not only lower our costs but will also decrease our reliance on imported fuel and reduce pressure on balance of payments. We therefore must carefully assess the institutional needs for the proposed AEDB merger and think through any future changes with this lens.

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Vision of Allama Iqbal By Reema Shaukat

A FEW weeks back I came across a video in which one of Turkish Prime Ministers in his speech was admiring Dr Muhammad Iqbal's vision and effort to create spur among Muslims to help Turks during war. The depth of love, affection and respect among the Turkish people and leadership for Muhammad Iqbal is visible today because of his immense services for Islam and contribution to Turkish causes including during the Balkan wars and Turkey's War of Independence. It was quite a moment of pride with nostalgia that we as a nation are so blessed that Allama Iqbal was our visionary leader, whose wisdom, poetry and foresightedness is still a vigil for us after many decades.

The world acknowledges our leaders so much that still today they quote them in their discourse. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, born on Nov 9 1877 is recognised as the national poet of Pakistan. He was a firm supporter and believer of the politically aware, mystic and divine revival of Islamic civilisation across the world particularly in sub-continent. His poetry is still considered a beam to move forward and take guidance with belief in Khudi. Allama Muhammad Iqbal pulled the Muslims out of the spirals of ignorance and restlessness through his poetry and showed them the right path to their destiny of achieving independence and 'khudi.' He was one of the most prominent leaders of the All India Muslim League who encouraged the creation of a "state in north-western India for Muslims" in his 1930 presidential address. As a leading philosophical and literary voice during the time of Indian independence and the eventual partition of the country, Iqbal was an important political and social leader in the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, though he died in 1938 but he gave vision to the people through his poetic collections. That's why he is honoured as the "Poet of the East".

Allama Iqbal wrote in Persian, Urdu and English and his poetry and prose explore deep existential questions and thoughts about the soul, human life and connexion with God. Iqbal first published a collection of poetry, Asrar-e-Khudi, (Secrets of the Self) in 1915. It is written in Urdu and refers to life as a spiritual journey to realise the inner spark of mysticism within, and be thus transformed. Iqbal in his poetry, especially in "Javid Nama", had referred to Rumi as Peer-e-Rumi or his mentor as he was deeply influenced by 13th century Persian Sufi poet, Jalal ud din Rumi but Iqbal's inspirations were not limited to the East. During his academic studies at Trinity College in Cambridge and Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, where

he received his PhD, Iqbal was well-versed with the writings of Nietzsche, Bergson, Goethe, Dante and other philosophers.

If we look back into history, we can clearly grasp that Iqbal was definitely the chosen one who was assigned the duty to invigorate the nation and to prepare them for creation of Pakistan. He conveyed the message of hope, belief and unanimity and asked confused Muslims to bind their abilities together on a chosen platform. He equated youth with the qualities of falcon and called them Shaheen in his poetry, just to give youth an inspiration from the qualities of that bird that has vision, flies high and always fight for its existence through continuous efforts. He established that this character and attitude would actually enable them to grasp their fortune and redeem magnificence of Muslim Ummah. Iqbal always desired for Muslims unity to regain their renaissance and appear in world as super power which is much needed today when we come across the situation of Muslims around the globe. We can see them suffering and struggling for their existence and identity.

Unfortunately, we were blessed with his vision for Pakistan but we didn't care about the prosperity and progress of country and preferred divisions on the basis of caste, creed, sectarianism, provincialism and other petty issues. Since its inception till today, we are unable to make it citadel of Islam because of our inner differences. We because of our inner weaknesses could not make it that successful and powerful which our visionaries and forefathers thought of.

But still if we don't waste more time and try to follow system in every walk of life we can achieve reason for creation of Pakistan. We must believe in ourselves or Iqbal's concept of self-realisation which he called khudi. There is no doubt about the abilities and potentials of his dreamt falcons and they are doing their best within available resources but this progress should not remain limited to one class. We should move forward by defeating class difference, political ideologies and economic alterations and believe in progress of Pakistan with given equal rights to all and sundry.

It is time to think and implement his vision for us in our lives. Schools, colleges and other institutions must celebrate Iqbal day while creating awareness in our new generation about the Iqbal's dream and wish for Pakistan and Muslims. On this day, we should revive our promise to Iqbal for the betterment of Pakistan and

fulfilment of his vision. Together we can bring harmony, peace, justice and prosperity in our Pakistan which for sure is need of the hour and every true Pakistani is desirable too. Definitely Iqbal's philosophy and thoughts preached to youth can play a constructive role in progress of country.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/vision-allama-iqbal/>

World Safest Nuclear Programme By Dr Muhammad Khan

DESPITE a global acceptance of Pakistan's nuclear programme, as one of the safest in the world, there always have been conspiracies against it by US and Indian officials. Through various researches, one would know that US stands at number one, being the first nuclear power responsible for nuclear proliferation. It is the only country in the history of nuclear weapons which used this destructive weapon against the humanity (Japan) in 1945 and today trying to ally with that nation.

Indeed, after detonation of nuclear devices in May 1998, it has been generally seen that the US and Western think tanks, media and even officials, have been working overtime to create a scare about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear programme. A few years back, a US journalist, Seymour M Hersh created an alarm by writing an article that a squad of US special elite forces, which has been trained to operate covertly for the extraordinary assignments like seizure of nuclear weapons in case of real emergency, is already in Islamabad. He also disclosed that the squad comprises experts of terrorism and non-proliferation having blend from US intelligence setup, FBI, DOE and Pentagon. In his opinion, they are stationed in US Embassy in Islamabad and are mandated to take control of the Pakistani nukes in the event where Pakistan might be either overrun by militants.

Such type of the misperception and misreporting have always been followed by supplements like, "US has contingency plans to secure Pakistani nukes if things get out of hand". Apart from this, there exist a misperception in the Western world and United States that every Pakistani including Armed Forces people are fundamentalist and equipped with dangerous weapons and bombs in order to take on anyone and everyone visiting the country. The campaign against the safety and security of the Pakistani nukes has always been there. Earlier Bruce Riedel claimed that Pakistan was expanding its nuclear programme by purchasing new power plants from China to increase the production of fissile material, whereas it is already facing security challenges to its existing nuclear arsenal. He declared Pakistan as a "unique nuclear country which has both obtained and proliferated the nuclear technology" But he perhaps forgot to trace back the history of US nuclear weapons, where all the scientists less one, who worked on the Manhattan

Project, were European expatriates. These scientists were brought to United States “with their ‘stolen’ nuclear secrets from Germany, Italy, Austria and the Scandinavian countries”.

Subsequently US became the only proliferator of the all nuclear weapons and missile programme today the world is afraid of. As also accepted by people like Herish and IAEA, Pakistani nuclear arsenals is protected through multilayered defences, improbable to be breached, therefore cannot be approached by anyone. Furthermore, these weapons are never stored in the assembled form and kept in parts in the scattered form. Even in the worst case scenario, if someone approaches any such weapon in assembled form, these cannot be operated without the specific operational code, known to only the ‘anonymous men’.

In order to avoid even a minor chance of mishap, Pakistan created two extremely significant institutions; the National Command Authority (NCA) in March 1999 and the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) as a permanent Secretariat of NCA in February 2000. Through institutionalization of the command and control system of the strategic arsenal, Pakistan has reduced the chances of pilferage or unwanted incursions or dissemination of information about its nukes. In the subsequent steps, Pakistan has developed a nuclear dogma with absolutely secure “communication system that was integrated with intelligence and reconnaissance efforts and brought under the NCA to provide command and control during any crisis”. Over the period, the export control regulations have been further augmented by incorporating the modern safety and security apparatus, thus ensuring absolute security of the facilities at the indigenous level. Pakistan has adopted potent measures as part of Nuclear Security Action Plan, Mobile Expert Support Teams (MEST) and Nuclear Emergency Management System (NEMS) to respond and manage nuclear emergency and securities. Additionally, SPD has deputed approx 25,000 personnel to secure Pakistan’s nuclear facilities with extensive barriers, detection systems, separate storage of nukes and security system to prevent unauthorized use to meet international IAEA standards.

In its entire history and especially after attaining a nuclear power status, Pakistan has proved to be the most responsible nuclear power in the comity of nations. Contrary to the nuclear champions of the world, there have been no occasions, when Pakistani nuclear armed missiles were loaded erroneously or otherwise on the fighter aircrafts, as done by US Air Force some time back nor its scientists

disappeared with nuclear material and later found dead, like India or there never have been incidents of chemical and nuclear leakages as happened in the case of India and United States, which resulted into the killing of thousands of innocent souls. It is upsetting that, despite extensive safeguards in place, Pakistan's nuclear activities are still considered unsafe by the Western lobbies. Pakistan is the only nuclear country with zero incidents of mishap. All other nuclear states have such incidents on their credit including the US having maximum incidents of nuclear negligence. There is a need that US media, officials and think-tanks must exercise extreme care while passing comments on Pakistan's nuclear programme, the world's safest nuclear programme.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/world-safest-nuclear-programme/>

The Ticking Population Bomb By Hasaan Khawar

Pakistan is now the world's fifth most populous country with a population of 207+ million, depicting a 2.4% annual growth since 1998. Seemingly, the country's family planning approach has failed to create a serious dent in the population growth. Many blame 'deep-rooted religious beliefs' and cultural impediments. But apparently that's not true.

Let's look at other countries. India and Bangladesh have a population growth rate of 1.2% and 1.1%, respectively. But what's happening in other Muslim countries? Iran, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia have growth rates of 1.2%, 1.5% and 2.2%, respectively. We have outpaced them all.

Let's dig a bit deeper. Future population growth depends on fertility rates, depicting average number of children born alive to a woman during her lifetime. Pakistan's fertility rate stands at 3.8, according to the Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13. And there is not much difference across provinces, with Punjab at 3.8 and Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa at 3.9. Balochistan does have a higher fertility rate of 4.2 but due to small population size, it has little bearing on our national fertility rate. India and Bangladesh, on the other hand, have fertility rates of 2.4 and 2.14, respectively, whereas Iran, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia are at 1.68, 1.93 and 2.71, respectively.

Even more interestingly, if it were not because of our poor healthcare service delivery, our population growth would have been even higher. Average life expectancy in Pakistan is merely 66 years, as compared to 72 for Bangladesh, 74 for Malaysia and Saudi Arabia and 75 for Iran. If we somehow improve our life expectancy to Bangladesh's or Iran's level, our population growth rate would be way higher at present fertility rates.

How can fertility rates be lowered? Through increasing contraceptive prevalence rates (CPR), which depict percentage of women who are currently using at least one method of contraception. According to the last reported figures, CPR in Pakistan stands at 35% amongst married women of reproductive age, compared to an average of almost 53% for South Asia and 77% for Iran.

Data shows that 99% of ever-married women and 95% of ever-married men in Pakistan are aware of at least one modern method of family planning. While the uptake of contraceptives is definitely a challenge, the real problem is poor access.

One in every five women wants to space her next birth or stop childbearing entirely but is not using contraception, depicting a very high unmet need. Assuming that married women of reproductive age represent 16% of total population, there are 6.6 million women with unmet need out of a total 33+ million. Adding 3.3 million more using traditional contraceptive methods, we can very well understand that a large part of our failure can be attributed to non-availability of services. Even if we only focus on this segment of 10 million women with clear demand, we can easily exceed India's CPR and significantly reduce our population growth.

A Population Council report on low modern contraceptive use in Pakistan and neighbouring countries blamed 'supply-side factors, including poor access to services and lack of counselling and technical knowledge of unmotivated providers' as primary reason behind low uptake of contraceptives.

Given our poor track record with family planning, there is a need to adopt out-of-the-box approaches. Punjab is the first province to realise the limitations of existing family planning service delivery and has established Punjab Population Innovation Fund to address the unmet need in rural, poor and un-served areas. Other provinces need to follow suit.

Looking at past trend, we'll touch 450+ million by 2050 but even if we assume that our growth has slowed down to 2%, we'd still be at 400 million. A large population base with a high growth rate is a ticking bomb. It's high time to acknowledge this.

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Pak-US Ties: A Complicated Path | Editorial

THE Pak-US relationship is likely to back in the spotlight during the next two weeks as at least two senior US officials, Secretary of Defence James Mattis and chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Joseph Dunford, are set to visit Pakistan.

By now, it is apparent that any senior US military delegation will insist on the 'do more' aspect of President Donald Trump's strategy on Afghanistan, likely demanding that Pakistan take fresh steps to curb the alleged presence of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network on Pakistani soil.

If presented as a belligerent demand, the Pakistani reaction may be equally sharp — worsening tensions in an already fraught relationship.

A far more sensible approach would be if each side were to draw up a list of priorities in the context of the Trump South Asia strategy and work towards a middle ground.

As Pakistan has rightly insisted, and many US diplomats have concurred, the path to long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan is a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban.

What is the best path to get to a common end?

President Trump's strongman approach to problems from North Korea to Syria suggests that he is willing to give the US military a wide latitude in Afghanistan, but there is no realistic scenario in which the Afghan Taliban are defeated by a combination of US and Afghan security forces in the foreseeable future.

That necessarily means a strategy of militarily degrading the Afghan Taliban in order to force them to the negotiating table — something the US has grudgingly recognised, but has done little to make possible.

Complicating the time line are the Afghan parliamentary elections scheduled for 2018 and presidential elections for 2019.

With political uncertainty likely to hover over Afghanistan for the next couple of years, the Afghan government may not be in a position to negotiate with the Afghan Taliban and the latter may be disinclined to negotiate within a political framework that is unsettled.

The combination of all those factors may lead the US to fall back on blaming Pakistan for lack of progress in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan — an unwelcome situation for this country.

Clarity of purpose and strategy, then, at this time is necessary.

Work with the US where possible to advance peace in Afghanistan and other regional interests of both sides and prepare for a bumpy road ahead if quick successes are not won.

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Are we Destined to be Enemies? By Talat Masood

One of the foremost foreign policy challenges for Pakistan has been managing its relations with India. The task has become more onerous since Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been in office. Modi's policy thrust has been to isolate Pakistan by coopting Afghanistan and drawing strength from its strategic relationship with the US. And hostility towards Pakistan has become a part of the national political narrative. This was apparent during the last elections of 2014 when anti-Pakistan sentiment was deliberately whipped up to draw votes.

Fortunately, Pakistan has been successful in resisting the pressure, as it is inconceivable for the people to be subservient to India. It will cut against the very foundational ethos of Pakistan.

In addition, Islamabad draws strength from its strategic relations with China and dependable allies such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Lately, Islamabad has been expanding its relations with Moscow, trying to remove Tehran's misgivings and cultivating friends in Central Asia to expand its regional links.

Pakistan and India combine national anthems to make viral hit on Independence Day

There is a general consensus within the country that India's aggressive policy is a means to subdue the voice of Pakistan in its support for the genuine struggle of the people of Kashmir. Kashmiri youth leader Burhan Wani's death and the continuous extrajudicial killings that have triggered a mass movement and outrage in Kashmir have found resonance and sympathy in Pakistan.

More significantly, Pakistan realises the significance of maintaining a strong conventional force superimposed by a nuclear dimension to maintain a balance against India's expanding military capability. Developing a significant conventional capability and minimum credible deterrence has been possible only by diverting substantial national resources. For this the people continue to make huge sacrifices as substantial fiscal resources are allocated year after year for the defence- and security- related budget.

India and the US are both opposed to Pakistan's expanding strategic partnership with China. They are bitterly against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and are likely to create hurdles in the way of its implementation. Although there are indications that the United States has softened its position towards the corridor, Indian hostility stems from its unwillingness to cede strategic space and economic benefits that would accrue to China and Pakistan from the successful implementation of the project. To create impediments, India is supporting the Baloch nationalist movement monetarily as well as politically.

Despite domestic opposition from influential quarters, Pakistan has been seeking normalisation of relations with India. Fortunately, there is unanimity among major political parties for improving relations. Because there is a realisation that the future of Pakistan and of South Asia lies in a cooperative relationship between countries. Moreover, willingness to engage with an intransigent Indian leadership is not submission to New Delhi's dictates but is a reflection of Pakistan's mature approach towards it. No one expects Pakistan's forward-looking approach would lead to any resolution of the disputes but at least it may contribute to easing tensions. More significantly, keeping channels of communication open with India acquires greater significance in the light of constant flare-up on the Line of Control.

Nuclear powers with contiguous borders cannot afford to remain in such a high level of hostility without communicating with each other. There are clear dangers associated from the current revolt of the people of occupied Kashmir that are being ruthlessly suppressed. In order to divert international attention from the Kashmiri uprising, Indian authorities are pursuing policies that are making matters worse. A future terrorist attack in India from the Kashmir related groups or by any other militant organisation could be conveniently labelled as being sponsored by Pakistan. This could lead to serious consequences. Besides, Modi's militaristic approach towards Kashmir and hostility towards Pakistan provides encouragement to militant groups.

India has very naively committed itself to launching "surgical strikes" and limited military operations as a part of its Cold Start doctrine. A strong retaliatory response by Modi's government in the event of an incident in India is a dangerous scenario. It is possible that some militant organisations may deliberately create a confrontational situation by initiating a terrorist attack.

Indians sing Pakistan's national anthem as Independence Day gift

We also have to bear in mind that asymmetry between India and Pakistan at the conventional level could result in escalating the conflict in a relatively short period to the nuclear threshold.

The role of the US during an India-Pakistan conflict though undefined is likely to lean in favour of India. It could take the form of cooperating closely at the intelligence level or may result in destroying our delivery systems, be it aircraft or missiles.

The Indian government and media have been reiterating that they are the victims of terrorism emanating from Pakistan. But if an honest appraisal was done, it would be clear that Pakistan had far greater number of terrorist attacks and casualties as compared to India. By adopting this approach they want to belittle our efforts and sacrifices and deflect focus from their shortcomings in Kashmir. The international community is gradually realising that New Delhi's narrative lacks credibility.

A more honest and productive approach for India would have been to cooperate and work together to eliminate the scourge of terrorism.

At a time when the world is faced with enormous geopolitical challenges and each of the South Asian countries are struggling to break the shackles of poverty and ignorance cooperation and not confrontation between India and Pakistan should have taken priority. New Delhi's current policy against Pakistan has not succeeded in the past and unlikely to bear fruit in future. Neither has Pakistan's policy of giving support to some militant groups worked to its advantage. It is time both countries moved away from being domination by security considerations and engaged in dialogue to find an amicable solution of Kashmir and other issues. This would not be a sign of weakness or desperation but a way forward towards how countries resolve their differences in the best interest of their people.

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Further Solidifying Pak-Saudi Relations | Editorial

REGULAR exchanges at the level of civil and military leadership are an important feature of Pakistan-Saudi relationship – something which has not only helped further strengthen bonds of friendship but also promoted understanding on wider issues between the two countries. The recent visit of Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi along with the military leadership to Riyadh can be seen in the same context as it provided an opportunity to both the sides to discuss ways and means to further diversify their relations in the realm of economy and security.

Given the tumultuous situation faced by the Middle Eastern countries in particular and the Muslim countries in general, it is in fact in the interest of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, being the important members of the Muslim Ummah, to further consolidate their relations that date back to many decades. Both the countries have always stood by each other in the hours of trial. The people of Pakistan have always shown special love and affection for the custodian of two holiest mosques. The Kingdom has also been the destination of choice for a large proportion of Pakistani economic migrants. It is also a fact that our workers and labourers enjoy great respect in the Kingdom for the contribution they are making in its economic development. During his interaction with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Al-Saud, PM Abbasi also offered human resource and technical assistance to the Kingdom in achieving its Vision 2030-the economic transformation plan. We expect that this offer of PM Abbasi, which is most likely to be accepted because of the trust that the Saudi authorities have in Pakistanis, will further open doors for our skilled and semi-skilled force to the Kingdom. Then quite recently, we also heard the Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan expressing its country's interest in investing in multi billion dollars China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project and Gwadar port. We understand that such plans aimed at bolstering trade and investment relations as well as exchange of human resource will be translated into reality at the earliest as these have the potential to further coagulate the relations.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/solidifying-pak-saudi-relations/>

Strategic Pivot of Pakistan-US Relationship By Muhammad Ali Ehsan

Reportedly two top officials from the US — Defence Secretary James Mattis and Joint Chief of Staff Chairman Joseph Dunford — will be visiting Pakistan in the next week. Even before the visits can take place ‘the tone of their visit’ is being set by General John W Nicholson, the commander of US and Nato forces in Afghanistan. The general on Nov 28th said that “he had not seen any change in Pakistan’s support for militants so far, despite President Donald Trump taking a tougher line against Islamabad.” Pakistan is accused of supporting the Afghan Taliban and the US wants it to take actions against any militants, mostly referred to as the Haqqani Network, that cross the border from Pakistan’s side and execute attacks on Afghanistan’s soil. The current ‘strategic deadlock’ between the US and Pakistan stems from the Pakistani position taken by both the civilian and military leadership that “Pakistan has done enough,” and the military and security reverses that what the US and its trained Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) face in Afghanistan is because of their own poor security planning and lack of military action against the Afghan Taliban within Afghanistan’s own borders.

Gen Mattis is already putting Pakistani leadership in a tight spot even before he has arrived by giving his pre-visit statements like “the US would try one more time to work with Pakistan in Afghanistan before President Donald Trump would turn to options to address Islamabad’s alleged support for militant groups.” When asked by a reporter that Pakistan could undertake temporary changes only to go back on its old ways, the US defence Secretary replied, “We don’t want transient and temporary changes and Islamabad must understand that while there are significant advantages to changing, the penalties for not changing are just as significant.” This isn’t the language of encouragement and support by the US to an ally that is tied in partnership to fight the War on Terror instead it’s a threatening language that disregards the tremendous sacrifices Pakistan has given. Where to from here would the Pakistan-US strategic relationship now go? To me, both countries have already approached a ‘strategic pivot’ in their relationship, the precise timing of end of which may be uncertain but surely the upcoming high-profile visits will prove a catalyst.

Pakistan will continue to disagree with President Trump's assessment that Pakistan is a safe haven to "agents of chaos, violence and terror." More importantly, it seems the civilian and military leadership in Pakistan has finally decided to fight the WoT not 'by changing its behaviour' but how to fight it under the (possible) US imposed economic depravity and diplomatic isolation, if in case the US decides not only to step back from the US-Pakistani partnership but also impose certain sanctions on Pakistan. While the strategic ending of the partnership has been on the cards for a long time now the real question is will the US benefit from the discontinuity of this partnership?

What the US needs to remember is that it is not only Afghanistan's insecurity but its broader conflict with the 'jihadists' terrorism' in which it needs the support of countries like Pakistan. It should not look at its relationship with Pakistan from a narrow policy goal of apportioning blame on Pakistan for its own huge security failure. More broadly, it should focus on helping to eliminate the causes that breed extremism and radicalisation in countries like Pakistan. As long as the causes of jihadist ideology persist, so too will the threat to the regional as well as global security.

Didn't the US try the 'heavy foot print strategy' in Afghanistan and maintained over 100,000 troops at the height of its surge (Obama's way of war in 2011-2014)? At that time why was strict border management on the Afghan side of the border not tried? The simple answer is that the nature of terrain and the hundreds of posts that stretch and expand over 2,430kms of border present easy and vulnerable targets to the Taliban, and a reliance on such a security method and strategy would have meant risk of higher casualties. It is interesting to read Rod Nordland's report in The New York Times titled 'US Expands Kabul Security Zone, Digging In for Next Decade'. This report suggests that even now the US emphasis is not on implementing tighter and stricter control on Pakistan-Afghan border management but on expansion and security of the Green Zone around Kabul, which houses Western embassies, government ministries and the Nato and US military headquarters. Norland's report emphasises that "even after 16 years of US presence in Kabul the expansion of the Green Zone in Kabul is a reminder that even the capital city's central districts have become too difficult to defend from Taliban's bombings."

Reports also suggest that all the six Afghan Military Corps are now engaged in offensive operations in Afghanistan. That is good news but as long as Pak-Afghan border is not manned by ANSF's defensive corps both Afghanistan and Pakistan will keep accusing each other of not preventing the cross-border movement of the militants. Having spent \$800 billion in this 17-year-old war that has cost it over 2,000 casualties and over 20,000 wounded, is the US still justified to keep fortifying Kabul and do nothing at the Pak-Afghan border that it considers the only place from where trouble emanates?

The US and Nato force presence in Afghanistan suggests that the US is not planning to fight the Taliban on the battlefield. This 'light foot print' approach necessarily features reliance on drone and other long-range strikes on the militants with occasional Special Forces operations against the militant hideouts that would continue to have a large ANSF's component. Is this an international force that seems to be gearing up by digging in the Green Zone to win a war in Afghanistan?

To sum up, those responsible to charting America's strategic course in the years ahead in the Afghan war must not lose sight of two important factors. One, the road to success in Afghan war runs through Pakistan and for that both the US and Pakistan need to partner rather than take opposite views on how to fight this war. Two, without border management and control on the Afghan side of the border infiltrators will continue to sneak into Afghanistan from Pakistan's side and vice versa — for that Pakistan cannot be unilaterally blamed — doing more at the US and Afghan end is equally crucial to win this war.

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ECONOMY

Towards An Inclusive Economy By M. Ziauddin

We do need a bipartisan economic policy blueprint to make the most of indigenous comparative advantages for enabling the national economy to come out its dependence on dole while at the same time developing into an essential clog of the interdependent world.

According to Thomas Piketty (*Capital in the Twenty-First Century* — Pp. 491), the development of a fiscal and social state is intimately related to the process of state-building as such, “Hence the history of economic development is also a matter of political and cultural development, and each country must find its distinctive path and cope with its own internal divisions.” So, it is imperative that Pakistan should try to find its own distinctive path to progress. But no matter how distinctive the path is, unless both the national incomes and tax collections rise to a reasonable level, the economy of developing countries like Pakistan would either continue to remain dole-dependent or trapped into a stagnant mode going south.

In sub-Sahara and South Asia the average tax bite was slightly below 15 per cent in 1970 and early 1980 but fell to a little over 10 per cent in 1990. Piketty partly blames rich countries and international organizations for this state of affairs in poor countries. “The initial situation was not very promising. The process of decolonization was marked by a number of chaotic episodes in the period 1950-70: wars of independence with the former colonial powers, somewhat arbitrary borders, military tensions linked to the Cold War, abortive experiments with socialism, and sometimes a little of all three. After 1980, moreover, the new ultraliberal wave emanating from the developed countries forced the poor countries to cut their public sectors and lower the priority of developing a tax system suitable to fostering economic development. Recent research has shown that the decline in government receipts in the poorest countries in 1980-1990 was largely due to a decline in customs duties which had brought in revenues equivalent to about five per cent of national income in 1970. Trade liberalization is not necessarily a bad

thing, but only if it is not peremptorily imposed, and only if lost revenue can gradually be replaced by a strong tax authority capable of collecting new taxes and other substitute sources of income. Today's developed countries reduced their tariffs over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries at a pace they judged to be reasonable and with clear alternatives in mind. This illustrates a more general phenomenon: the tendency of the rich countries to use the less developed world as a field of experimentation, without really seeking to capitalize on the lessons of their own historical experience.

Meanwhile, the real estate sector in countries like Pakistan started eating into resources generated by domestic economic activity. To combat this challenge the government tried to regulate the real estate market through suitable legislation. Next it tried to deal with the practice of holding properties and bank accounts under fake names (benami).

Real estate has, over the years, become the mother of all corruption as it has served as the safest haven for all tainted resources and rents earned through corruption-like tax evasion and avoidance, bribery, kick-backs, smuggling, black marketing, human trafficking as well as drug and gun running. And in the last two decades or so the real estate market had become the safest source of terror financing as well.

Former civil servant Saeed Ahmad Qureshi, in his book *Governance Deficit — a case study of Pakistan*, published on August 18, 2016, maintains that the processes that curtail governance space fall in four categories: a) inertia, b) ceding governance space, c) erosion of governance space and, d) surrender of governance space.

Quoting from well-researched papers by reputable economists, Mr. Qureshi has sketched in brief the gradual expansion of the informal economy in the country and its implications to governance:

“In Pakistan, the informal economy has been expanding over time. Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC), Karachi, reported in 2000 that the informal economy was about 42 per cent of the national economy in 1980-81; that it grew to 46 per cent in 1998-99 and 50 per cent of the national economy in 2000.

“In 2008, the informal economy was estimated by Ali Kemal and Ahmed Waqar to be between 74 per cent and 91 per cent. However, in the Conference of Pakistan Institute of Development Economics held on 15th November, 2012, Ali Kemal claimed that the informal economy was 91.4 per cent of the formal economy.

“The informal segment of the economy does not pay direct taxes, though it might be paying transaction-related indirect taxes, such as excise and sales tax. Its prevalence limits the impact of policies, weakens resource base of the state, reduces the reliability of economic data, and results in an understatement of size of GDP. It is outside the regulatory framework of the government. However, being a major source of employment, it cannot be dismissed out of hand.” (Pp.212-214.)

According to Mr. Qureshi, within the formal economy there have been numerous instances of ceding governance space in the fiscal regime, sacrificing long-term advantages for short term gains. An important example is the introduction of the bearer instruments in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. There have also been a number of tax amnesties in Pakistan. Each amnesty is declared to be the last, but the count keeps on growing. So far there have been seven amnesty schemes.

While there is continuous boom in Pakistan’s real estate the country suffers from a backlog of about ten million housing units of which around 3.5 to 4 million are said to be in the urban region and most for low-income groups. However, since only 300,000 housing units are being built annually, the backlog continues to bulge. That is perhaps why 68 per cent of Pakistan’s population has only one per cent of total housing stocks, whereas 56 per cent of housing stock is meant for 12 per cent of the upper income segments.

Katchi abadis and shanty towns are said to have sprouted all over our cities to serve those who fail to find an affordable shelter in the cities and towns as the demand for housing continues to expand while the supply remains too far behind. Indeed, there is said to be a huge untapped market and unmet demand for affordable housing units in the urban areas particularly for the low and lower-middle income segments.

Despite huge demand for housing, the overall contribution of housing finance is very low — less than one percent of the GDP. The stakeholders argue that multiple risks impact the performance of the housing finance sector. Lack of transparency

in property markets is said to be a key constraint. Despite the ample potential of business and social need of housing, the highly challenging business environment usually prevents international investors, local businessmen and even ordinary people to save and invest in housing enterprises.

The market has been unable to meet the growing demand to supply housing stock at affordable prices. An individual earning between Rs20,000 to 25,000 per month (working in the public/private sector or self-employed) and responsible for maintaining his/her nuclear family as well as members of the extended family would save (after all expenses relating to rent, food, utilities, transportation and miscellaneous are deducted) no more than Rs1,500. With the average person saving Rs1, 500 and the average 80 square yard plot costing Rs700, 000, it would take nearly 40 years before one could afford such a plot. The result is the current housing crisis Pakistan is faced with.

As a start the government could reform the House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC) to provide a mechanism allowing potential purchasers who have an income to save for and eventually purchase a housing unit. The HBFC could also include a subsidized savings program linked to a retirement account, subsidized mortgage rates and price discounts.

At the same time the government could also launch a Public-Private Partnership scheme for development of public properties and identified green technologies and materials suitable for lower-income households. The Government of Pakistan can also consider the following for establishing the enabling environment for making affordable housing a reality: a) Changes to the law to allow banks to hold Consumer Housing Assets on their books; b) Changes to the laws to allow Consortium Financing for large-scale Residential Compounds on State released land at provincial level; c) Issuance of Housing Sukuk, with participation by owners of houses of large-scale housing projects financed under Islamic Banking; d) Introduction of new construction technologies on duty-free import basis and; e) Involving Microfinance & SME Banks to provide funding to low-income borrowers, by releasing targeted funding through the State Bank.

Also, the government could document all land available in the public and private sectors, digitize the documentation rendering ownership beyond an iota of doubt thus making it bankable so that land owners using the house-to-be-built as a

collateral borrow from the HBFC at concessional rates repayable over 40 years in easy installments.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/towards-inclusive-economy/>

Does Chabahar Matter? By Imtiaz Gul

Is the dispatch of the first Indian wheat gift to Afghanistan via Chabahar only a massive public relations gimmick or is it part of the Indo-US strategy to render Pakistan irrelevant — both geo-politically and geo-economically? Despite the fast development of the Gwadar Port and the completion of the CPEC projects, will the Chabahar lead Pakistan to lose its geo-strategic advantage?

Will Gwadar — the much bigger and touted natural deep sea port — still have enough traction to become the Pakistani Schenzen, the mega hub of electronics goods in southern China?

These questions beg deep introspection — if not cause worry — in Islamabad for various reasons. Firstly, what had started as a ‘little insignificant project for India’ has eventually become a reality, primarily born out of the strategic positioning by New Delhi i.e. minimising Afghanistan’s dependence on the Karachi Port for transit and bilateral trade. In the current circumstances, Chabahar presents a more ‘strategic’ safer and certain trade route for Afghanistan’s external trade.

Secondly, India is skillfully projecting its Chabahar venture as a critical element in its so-called Indo-specific expansion across the Indian- Pacific Ocean region, with Japan — an ideological adversary of China — and Australia more than keen to join forces in such regional connectivity projects in partnership with New Delhi.

Two recent opinion pieces in influential newspapers like Brisbane Times and Australian Financial Review are instructive in this regard. They exhorted the Australian government to further its ties with India and consolidate Indo-Pacific partnership, which would also help in countering China. Julie Bishop — Australia’s foreign minister recently said that “Australia, the United States, Japan, India and other nations have committed to ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains a peaceful and stable region”, indicating towards enhanced cooperation in the future.

Thirdly, unlike the Indo-Pacific partnership, Pakistan through the CPEC is increasingly getting bracketed with China. As a consequence, it has become a softer target for the Indo-US-Afghan geo-political games against Beijing, articulated by US foreign secretary Rex Tillerson during his recent Kabul and New Delhi visits, when he called for ‘deeper cooperation with India in the face of growing

Chinese influence in Asia'. Clearly, this geo-political posturing — masked in geo-economics — exposes Pakistan to multiple risks associated with such policies aimed at denying the adversary every single possible advantage.

Fourth, regardless of how the Pakistani governmental machinery takes it, the bitter reality is that the Indo-US alliance has decided to take on a thus far tactical Pakistan strategically. On the strategic front, unfortunately, Islamabad and Rawalpindi — still mired in tactics and suffering from the strategic location syndrome — have miserably lost to the smart geo-politics played by India.

Fifth, tardy, tit-for-tat responses to Kabul, have already nudged nearly 50 per cent of the Afghan transit and bilateral trade away from Karachi.

All the Afghanistan-bound cargo, for instance, has again come to a standstill as of November 1, following another high-handed circular by the Federal Board of Revenue, which requires the traders to furnish additional documents for clearance.

Unfortunately, Pakistan doesn't have national leaders such as Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi, or Erdogan — all of whom have placed their people above personal business interests

All this means additional costs and eroding the ease of doing business in and through Pakistan. Simple statistics speaks for the gradual decline in Afghanistan's external trade through Pakistan; between 2010 and 2011, Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan peaked at nearly \$2.4bn. They declined to \$2bn in 2011-13 and are likely to dwindle to less than \$ 1.5 billion this year.

Sixth, the Pakistani state seems victorious through the latest cargo clearance requirements (possibly in response to President Ghani's decision to deny Pakistani trucks a passage through Afghanistan), yet the real loser of this tit-for-tat reaction is the country's strategic interest — much more than the Afghan traders or their government. If the transit and bilateral trade with Afghanistan dries up, this also entails graver economic consequences for the small and medium business and human resource of the conflict-battered Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces.

Now if we look at Chinese and Pakistani officials, they all sound upbeat about the rapid progress of CPEC projects and hope that the Gwadar Port will — in five years from now — become South Asia's biggest shipping facility with a capacity of handling 13 million tonnes of cargo annually, likely to increase to 400 million tonnes annually by 2030.

More importantly, the Chinese use the Schenzen metaphor to denote their commitment to the development of Gwadar as a big industrial-based port for transshipments. The progress thus far makes CPEC, the fastest of the six Belt and Road Initiative corridors that Beijing plans to establish.

But with Pakistan's self-centered political leadership, unimaginative bureaucracy and an India-centric tactical military establishment, the journey to the Pakistani Schenzen will remain bumpy, lopsided, with the Chinese influence looming large all over.

To get there, and to optimally utilise Gwadar Port as well as CPEC-based development projects to the advantage of Pakistan in a geo-politically loaded environment, Pakistani leaders will need to pull up their socks and go beyond the current oratory and look-up to the Chinese for-bail-out mode. But unfortunately, Pakistan doesn't have national leaders such as Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi, or Erdogan — all of whom have placed their people above personal business interests. It is a context between strategic positioning (by India-US) and a tactical mindset (Pakistan) that reels from bureaucratic incompetence, indifference (of leadership) and an establishment that is still driven more by the conventional security paradigm than guided by the modern ways (geo-economics) to trump the adversaries.

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World Economic Order? By Khalid Saleem

It is an immutable law of nature that it is always the weaker creatures that are provided with extra protection. Would be predators, by that token, very rarely possess protective shells. Their prospective victims, though, invariably do. All in all, nature does believe in a balance of sorts. If predators were to have their way, no creature would enjoy the protection in the nature of a hard shell, spikes or colour camouflage. But, then, nature has its own priorities, quite unlike the case with humankind. One can pinpoint several obvious differences. Nature, for one thing, does not believe in 'multilateral treaties' heavily biased in favour of the strong. Instead, weightage is afforded only to those that are in dire need, not to those that are already over-endowed.

Having trudged this far, one owes the reader an explanation and a plausible one at that. The fact is that one is obliged to hark back to the laws of nature when confronted with man-made laws in this rather unjust world of ours. This is all the more relevant in the case of countries like the Land of the Pure. Time may perhaps be opportune to have a closer look at nature's design for the world at large (not to be confused with the world's designs on nature!).

Globalization, one was informed on good authority, meant open borders for flows of finance, business, trade, ideas and cultural values. Sounded good that, did it not? The advocates of globalization – and there were many – present this as a panacea for all ills of the world. "Globalize and all will be well" came through as the most popular slogan directed at the have-nots. Regrettably, like all such catchy slogans, this one too had a catch in it, based as it was on the presumption that what is good for the goose is equally good for the gander. The goose happened to be the industrialized developed world that believed that what was good for itself deserved to be rammed down the throats of the rest of the world.

Post World War II, the economic regime devised by the victors was heavily weighted against the poorer countries of the world, particularly the former colonies. The inevitable consequence has been a massive transfer of resources from the developing economies to the industrialized world, rather than vice versa. This has been made possible, among other things, by the very simple mechanism of maintaining an unjust – and unjustified – disproportion between the price structure of the products of industry and that of primary produce. The international prices of finished goods, exported by the industrialized world, have been constantly

increased in proportion to the rise in living standard of the inhabitants of these favoured lands.

The world prices of primary produce, on which the economies of the poorer countries depend, have not only failed to increase in proportion but also, in certain cases, have actually gone down. This one-sided disparity has been perpetuated through an intrinsically unfair international economic regime.

To have a rough idea of the inbuilt economic disparity, a cursory glance at some economic statistics may be of interest. Economies of the oil-producing countries in the Middle-East that were commonly considered to be “rich” and those of the “Asian Tigers”, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, that had some economic successes, hardly bear any comparison with the ‘economic performance’ of the industrialized western states. The total gross domestic product (GDP) of the entire Islamic World, comprising almost one fourth of humanity, comes to a paltry amount in comparison with the GDPs of individual industrialized states like France, Germany and Japan. What it all goes to prove is that the industrialized countries and their developing counterparts are all stuck in well-worn grooves from which there is little hope of escape.

Globalization was yet another attempt at perpetuating the inequitable status quo. The economies that depended heavily on the export of primary commodities never had a fair deal. The world prices of primary produce and those of the finished industrial goods, that used the former as raw material, should logically have had an enmeshed relationship. Regrettably, this never developed – prices of each being invariably manipulated by the rich industrialized countries to their own benefit.

Public memory is proverbially short. The courageous battle of yore fought by the oil-producing countries in the seventies and early eighties is all but forgotten. All hell had broken loose when the oil-producers demanded a fair price for their oil. Seeing the lay of the land, the producers of other primary products also added their feeble voices to the protest, demanding a slice of the cake. The ensuing negotiations in the multilateral economic forums dragged on for several years. As always, the “haves” won not only the battle but also the war. Save for the oil-producers, the “have-nots” failed in their quest to win a fair price for their produce.

What is more, they were burdened with the extra bill for the expensive oil in addition to dearer industrial products they imported from the industrialized countries.

Another aspect of the New International Economic Order on which one has not had time to dwell is the regime of the so-called “International Assistance”. This regime gave rise to a game of “lend lease” all to the advantage of the lenders, allied to bureaucratic corruption of horrendous proportions in the borrowing states. The result again was as could have been expected: to wit, a net transfer of resources of massive proportions away from the poor economies. But that, as they say, is another story!

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/world-economic-order/>

CPEC Entering Important Phase | Editorial

WITH several energy and infrastructure projects nearing completion, the multibillion dollar CPEC is now entering the crucial phase of industrial development. Three prioritized Special Economic Zones are set to take off, as during the second meeting of the joint working group the other day, Beijing agreed to cooperate in the development of Faisalabad, Hattar and Dhabeji industrial areas.

Development of the SEZs is the most critical part of the Long Term Plan of CPEC that promises industrialization of Pakistan, creation of hundreds of thousands of new jobs and enhanced economic and trade activities via the Gwadar port. Therefore, there should not be any delay in the construction of the zones equipped with all the required facilities. The provincial governments need to fulfil their responsibilities vis-à-vis completing their feasibility studies on the remaining six sites of SEZs – the approval of which was given in principle by the 6th JCC held in December last year so that they could also see dawn of a new day at the earliest. Whilst we have no doubt that the Chinese side will be more forthcoming to facilitate and encourage its companies to establish iconic projects in the zones to strengthen the Pak-China bilateral relations but simultaneously there is also need for our private sector to review and exploit the opportunities of launching joint ventures with the Chinese and other foreign friends interested to invest in the SEZs as this will provide them an opportunity to take advantage of their technology and expertise in different sectors, enabling higher productivity to meet the global standards. In fact such a mechanism needs to be developed and incentives are offered that attract more and more foreign investors in diverse fields ranging from processing of fruits, vegetables, minerals etc to the manufacturing sector. In fact bringing value addition to our commodities including those relating to agriculture and textiles are very vital if we really want to give a major push to our {if not dwindling but stagnant} exports and address most of our economic woes and end reliance on foreign assistance. SEZs and industrial clusters are two important drivers of China's remarkable economic development as they have contributed significantly to the GDP, employment, exports and foreign investment. The SEZs have also played role in bringing new technology to China and adopting modern management practices. Above all, the SEZs have successfully tested the market reforms in China and become role models for the rest of the world to follow. By using the Chinese experience, we are confident that the SEZs in our country will

also bring a marked change and contribute to the overall development and wellbeing of the people. Definitely, for this, the government will have to provide the enabling environment and incentives to the industrial clusters to grow without any roadblock.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/cpec-entering-important-phase/>

India's Bumpy Route to Kabul | Editorial

India and Afghanistan have finally developed a new trade route bypassing Pakistan. This was necessitated by Islamabad's refusal to allow two way trade between the two countries through its territory. India on Sunday shipped its first consignment of wheat to Afghanistan by the new transit route. Indian goods for Kabul will henceforth be transported by sea to Iran's Chabahar port. From there the cargo will be transferred to trucks and taken to Afghanistan via Zahidan. An air freight corridor between India and Afghanistan was also operationalized earlier this year to give a fillip to bilateral trade relations. The opening of the new sea-cum-land route constitutes a major leap in New Delhi's outreach to landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Pakistan's opposition to opening its roads to Afghan-India trade made little economic sense in a world where walls are being replaced with bridges for free flow of goods between nations. In fact all the three countries would have benefitted by the removal of trade barriers. With containers laden with goods moving freely between South Asia and Central Asia through Pakistan, this would have been economically a win-win situation for Islamabad. Increased trade between India and Pakistan would have cut production costs, brought down prices and created new jobs. The trade artery would have generated a level of interdependence motivating India and Pakistan to look for solutions to outstanding disputes including the core issue of Kashmir. This would have also improved Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. The landlocked Afghanistan will be henceforth no more dependent on Pakistan for trade with the rest of the world.

Among other things that drove Islamabad to deny India access to Afghanistan was New Delhi's unwillingness to enter into talks. Doubts have been expressed over Chabahar port's economic feasibility. Modi has been questioned over his claim that transport of Indian goods to Europe via road would be cheaper than through cargo ships. Kabul has apparently already warned India that the Taliban could attack trucks carrying Indian exports. India could have avoided the several hazards of the new route by joining CPEC which would have connected it to Afghanistan and Central Asia through Pakistan.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/10/31/indias-bumpy-route-to-kabul/>

SCO Membership: Success With Liabilities By Baber Ali Bhatti

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A few months ago, Pakistan successfully managed to secure the membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which is, undoubtedly, a significant accomplishment for Pakistan. Credit must be given to the drivers of Pakistan's foreign policy and owes to the multitude of reasons. However, Pakistan has much more to achieve via SCO platform because this membership has not only strengthened the regional position of Pakistan but at the same time has opened up various avenues of liabilities.

Therefore, this achievement needs to be capitalized further as is frequently quoted "With great power comes great responsibility". SCO membership is significant triumph for Pakistan for a number of reasons. Pakistan and China are already enjoying amicable relations in almost all spheres especially in the economic domain. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the landmark project which is being materialized and is effectively taking this mutual relationship to further heights. China is leading the Shanghai Club and Pakistan's inclusion in this club is the remarkable addition to Pak-China relations.

There hasn't been any substantial economic activity or joint venture between Pakistan and Eurasian countries. This membership may provide an opportunity for Pakistan to enhance the trade volume and to launch the economic projects with Eurasian countries. This success is also being considered as economic success because through this membership, Pakistan is getting back on the right economic track. Along with that, Pakistan may boost the cooperation in the fields of transportation and tourism as these fields are still untapped in Pakistan. Eurasian countries are also considered rich for tourism. Therefore, there is a wider space for joint ventures in tourism. The SCO-membership also sends out a tacit message to the countries who have been attempting to diplomatically isolate Pakistan. The message is clear that their efforts are not going to bear any fruit in this regard. Pakistan's inclusion in SCO was the "warm welcome" by member-states which explicitly illustrates the diplomatic strength of Pakistan. Moreover, India has also been included in the Shanghai Club which might give the chance to the two countries to sort out their bilateral issues by utilizing the SCO forum. This could

also be viewed in terms of diplomatic achievement for Pakistan as it was able to secure the membership in parallel with India.

However, this achievement doesn't come without major liabilities. Speaking at a briefing in Beijing on June 1, 2017, the spokesperson of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hua Chunying said that China hoped Pakistan and India would improve bilateral relations after becoming the full members of SCO. "We hope that Pakistan and India will inject new impetus to the development of SCO." Pakistan must share its counter-terrorism experience with SCO member-states, especially Russia and the Central Asian states, for whom 'terrorism, extremism and separatism' have become an imminent threat. Such sharing on part of Pakistan may boost its position in SCO. Undoubtedly, sharing of this experience might be the most refined impetus to the development of SCO. Member-states, with the help of Pakistan, may propel to build a regional structure to counter the rising terrorism in which Pakistan may assume the leading role owing to its vast counter-terrorism exposure.

When it comes to cultural realm, Pakistan has more to do than India despite the fact that it enjoys peculiar socio-cultural diversity. Pakistan needs to put in vigorous efforts where it may offer cultural exchange ventures to deepen the ties with member-states, particularly with Eurasian belt. As far as global scenario is concerned, SCO is a forum of eight member-states with two having the permanent membership of United Nation Security Council and four members are the nuclear power countries. Hence the SCO possesses the potential to influence the global order with these member states. SCO can ensure long-lasting peace and stability in the region by making joint efforts. Pakistan must endeavour to lead such efforts. Pakistan should establish an institute devoted to formulate the policies attributed to member-states. Furthermore, the institute can propose different initiatives for Pakistan that will help it play critical regional and global role. Pakistan can advance itself in club by utilizing those initiatives that may serve the region in terms of peace and prosperity. Expanding the role of SCO, Pakistan and member states may also work for peace in Afghanistan. In short, by securing the membership, Pakistan ascribed itself with greater responsibilities and it must be looking forward to fulfil these responsibilities with dedication, commitment and diplomatic vigour.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/sco-membership-success-liabilities/>

Pak Rupee – Is it Overvalued? By Dr Kamal Monnoo

There is big debate going on these days on how the Pak Rupee is overvalued and why it should be devalued to help exports and to discourage imports; especially of luxury goods. Pakistan's trade deficit has never been larger, posting a growth of nearly 138%, period on period (first fiscal quarter) – and this gap is now looking increasingly un-sustainable, especially in the wake of country's dwindling exports. The main component of our exports, textiles, has been declining at a double-digit rate for most part of the year and other than services almost all sectors – rent seeking aside – appear to be uncompetitive when compared on the respective global corresponding-price scale. With pressure on foreign exchange outflows likely to increase in the coming months: external debt repayments, firming up oil prices, rising imports and fast increasing corporate profit/dividend repatriation, the pressure on the rupee's parity with international currencies is also increasing, in-turn leaving the investors and businesses in a quandary on how to function amidst this growing uncertainty on the rupee's future.

The general belief in the air is that Pak government is artificially holding the value of the rupee and the moment it stops supporting it the rupee will fall rapidly, the extent though remains anybody's guess. The IMF overvalues it by about 22-24%, private businesses quote a figure in excess of 15%, and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) inadvertently admitted in its own report that it perhaps needs to be revised downwards between 12% to 18%. This then leaves us with three fundamental questions: 1) Is the Pak Rupee truly over valued? 2) If yes, then should it be devalued? And 3) If so, then by how much? On the answer to the first question, the truth is that the position is a bit confusing for two reasons: First, while on one hand we have all the indicators on retarding exports, escalating imports and a growing level of un-competitiveness in general in our domestic manufacturing, but then on the other hand the reality is that despite this notion on an over valued rupee there seems no panic in the open (foreign exchange) currency market, for example, the daily trading in buying and selling of dollars in the open market continues to remain normal. As a student of economics, if one believes in free market forces to be the real determinant of a product's true value, then why question rupee's present parity? After all, it retains its parity in the open market at around 107 (to a dollar) with no apparent panic or beeline for hedging (dollars) nor

any shortage of the green back's availability – and this, despite the ripe rumors on an imminent devaluation; SBP's dwindling reserves; fast approaching payments on external debt; and with no cap on profit or royalty cum technical-fee repatriation by foreign firms. Second, history tells us that in today modern day economy governments no longer have the luxury to sustainably hold national currencies at artificially desired levels. The infamous Soros run on the Malaysian Ringgit exposed the myth of even thriving (with high foreign exchange reserves) economies' ability to preserve currency values once the market confidence erodes. More recently, we have seen that in spite of having relatively high foreign exchange reserves countries like Turkey (around \$80 billion), Nigeria (similar \$70-80 billion) and Egypt (close to \$60 billion) were unable to arrest currency slides once the global and domestic confidence in the government and its policies dipped. So, if these countries with foreign exchange reserves much higher than that of Pakistan could not hold the value of their currencies, then what makes us think that our government can, even if it wants to?

To come to the second question on whether or not the rupee should be devalued to boost exports, there exists no empirical evidence to establish correlation of devaluation with sustainable growth in a country's exports. In fact, on the contrary, countries that have been associated with achieving exceptional success in national exports have all done so in periods where their respective currencies have been stable; the story of climbing the value added chain also comes across as being no different. Now it is altogether another argument where western economies allege that in China's case, during this period of a stable Rintinbi, it was nearly 40% under valued to start with! However, the larger argument perhaps is not to see devaluation as a recipe to enhance exports, but as a tool to address competitiveness and promote manufacturing, arguably the most important element of exports. Joseph Schumpeter (the management guru) explained this beautifully back in 1942: The joy of birth can only be achieved if a baby is born to yourselves and not merely to your neighbor or to someone else in the community (this with reference to domestic manufacturing) and the best thing you can do for your child is to make him compete in the real world and not just pamper him in the four walls of your home (and this in reference to competitiveness & exports). And lastly, there is the classical argument on the responsibility of governments to provide a level playing field at home. Meaning, if your competitors have devalued their currencies you are left with no choice but to follow suit. A cursory look on the list of our competition and one finds that over the last 3 years in a like-to-like comparison to

the devaluation of the Pak Rupee itself, China has devalued more than 8.50%, India about 5% and Vietnam about 3%.

Finally, to the last question that what should be done? Sadly, poor governance in recent years has brought us to a point where our choices are limited. If the Rupee loses its value, for every 1% devaluation, the stock of national debt (local and foreign) goes up by approximately Rs310 billion. This in turn damages other macro economic indicators, negatively affecting financial management of the government. Secondly, during the last 4 years, the Ministry of Finance in an effort to support the Rupee, has asked government and semi government entities to take dollar loans to pay off their imports (Foreign Exchange import loans, rather than buy dollars from the interbank market). The inventory of current such foreign exchange loans is estimated to be around US\$1.8billion. Any devaluation of the Rupee means a direct and proportionate hit on the P&L of those entities, which can cause a material hit on profits. Lastly, most of our imports are inelastic and any devaluation of the Rupee will cause the economy to import inflation, which in turn will increase reported inflation numbers. To counter this, the economic managers will have to increase interest rates. And since the Government of Pakistan is the largest borrower, any increase in interest rates will have a huge impact on fiscal deficit and Government's ability to manage its finances going forward. So any devaluation not only needs to be gradual but also supplemented by other measures in order to avoid using it as a solitary tool to address issues confronting domestic manufacturing.

The writer assesses a cost-of-production differential of about 10% with our regional competitors and recommends the following: Devalue currency by about 7% over the next 4 months; Provide additional 3% incentives to exporters in shape of outright rebates, albeit through the banking channels (not FBR); and abolish all unrelated surcharges from the power bills of the industry. Not only will this be a small cost to pay to retain home grown foreign exchange inflows, but also save us a great deal of future pain on account of capacity closures and unemployment – markets once lost can be difficult to recover.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/15-Nov-2017/pak-rupee-is-it-overvalued>

Pakistan and the Road and Belt Initiative By Shahid Javed Burki

Now once again China is reaching out to the world but this time in a different way. Compared to its opening to the West after the visit by President Richard Nixon in 1972, China's 'new opening' has a different geographic orientation. Then Pakistan played an important role. It is once again involved as Beijing is opening itself to the West in a different way. It has put its faith in land-based commerce to provide a different set of stimuli to its economy. What the World Bank in a 1993 study called the 'East Asian miracle' model has run its course. China is no longer a cheap-wage economy and there are no longer rapidly growing markets in Europe and the United States for its cheap manufactures. Wages in China have increased several-fold since it began to develop its economy. There are also other compulsions that the leaders in Beijing must take into consideration to move forward their economy.

It can no longer continue to develop the narrow strip of land that stretches from the northern port of Dalian to Guangzhou in the south. It must diversify its economy and spread development to the provinces in the country's mid-west and the west. And for that it needs Pakistan's help — an economic corridor that connects it to the sea. This is where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) enters the picture. The corridor through Pakistan is a part of what the leaders in China call the Road and Belt Initiative. The RBI is a cluster of projects involving the building of roads, railways, ports, oil and gas pipelines, fibre-optic cables that will link the Chinese economy with the countries to its west.

The new development paradigm China is adopting differs from the 'miracle economy' approach in several key aspects. China will look to the development of domestic demand to find opportunities for the productive sectors of its economy. Rapid economic growth in the past three decades has brought in new consumers into its own markets. Their demand is not much different from what the Western buyers of Chinese manufactured goods wanted. But these needs will not be satisfied by China's own industry. The Chinese will need to tap labour supplies in its neighbourhood. Pakistan, with a large and growing population, could be an important source of supply. CPEC is being designed not only to bring in industrial inputs such as minerals the country's large economy needs. It will also import

cheap manufactures from Pakistan. This is the reason why several industrial estates are being located along with the road network covered by CPEC.

China is also mindful of the mineral and energy riches available in the vast landmass that makes up the five countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan and western Pakistan. It has plans to exploit and develop these resources for use by its industry. A Pentagon study released a few years ago estimated Afghanistan's mineral wealth at one trillion dollars. The Chinese have already begun to exploit some of this untapped resource. Large investments have already been made to reach the iron ore available at a place located not too far from Kabul. Once the metal is extracted it will need to be transported and the least costly way of doing this is by road. Soon Pakistanis will see huge trucks carrying iron ore on the new road system that will connect the country with China.

The work associated with the RBI is progressing steadily in Pakistan. Results will become visible in the next few years as China's initiative knits together the countries of Central and West Asia. While the Donald Trump approach to South Asia would result in diminishing his country's presence in the subcontinent, that of China would increase significantly. It is also unlikely that the United States would succeed in building up India as a counterforce to the growing strength of China. Rex Tillerson, the United States Secretary of State, described what his government was trying to achieve in Asia as Donald Trump set out for the Asian trip earlier in November. He proposed a "free and open Indo-Pacific" area in which Australia, India, Japan and even Vietnam will help counter China's maritime expansion. But the idea is bankrupt if America is opposed to free and open trade. As The Economist wrote in a report on Trump's Asia visit, "an administration more clear-eyed about what is at stake for America would have taken more seriously China's belt-and-road initiative, linking Asia by land and sea to the Middle East and beyond."

The RBI is a large programme. It has been defined in very broad terms. Details will get filled in as the work on it progresses. Not unlike other ambitious initiatives, it too has its detractors. Both the United States and India oppose the programme but for different reasons. Once the RBI network of roads, railways and ports becomes functional, it will knit Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan closer with China. This will have the consequence of reducing the influence of the United States in the area. The fact that this time Pakistan seems less concerned about what I, in

the article in this space last week, called 'America's fourth exit' from the country has a great deal to do with the RBI and within it, CPEC. India also has reasons for opposing the Chinese initiative. As an Indian participant at an international seminar I recently attended put it: "The RBI is an effort to isolate my country by locking it in a system it cannot reach."

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1563176/6-pakistan-road-belt-initiative/>

Economic Reforms By Waqar Masood Khan

The term 'economic reform' is an amorphous concept. Since the word 'reform' is very attractive, anything can be sold in its garb. In this article, we will explore the meaning and rationale behind this concept.

The word 'reform' is used with respect to a state that is not desirable and in relation to a desirable state that can be attained by altering or reforming the undesirable state. Thus, two elements are necessary for a reform to be meaningful: the recognition of the undesirable state and the identification of the desirable state.

An example would fix the ideas: the free market is a superior and more efficient arrangement to determine economic outcomes, such as prices and the quantities that are demanded and supplied on those prices. Instead, if the government takes upon itself the burden of setting prices (petroleum prices, electricity tariffs or Hajj fares), there would be consequences in the shape of inefficiencies.

An inefficiency is, theoretically, a very precise concept – though there may be issues with its measurement. It is called deadweight, which roughly means that if it was removed, society would be better-off by this amount even though it may accrue to consumers and producers in different magnitudes. Conversely, society is worse-off by the amount of this loss – both consumers and producers are losers.

A change aimed at eliminating government role in price-setting and allowing the market to do so would be termed a reform as it moves the economy closer to zero deadweight loss. In general, an economic reform is any change that aims to remove distortions. A distortion is the existence of rules and regulations that inhibit the efficient working of the market economy.

To be precise, we have given a fairly simplified version of such reforms. It may not be a straightforward decision to abandon, for example, the price-setting role across the board or government regulations for that matter. There are occasions when the government cannot allow the private sector to set prices or disregard the legitimate interests of consumers who lack the capacity to check market excesses.

In the case of monopolies and economic activities entailing externalities (a situation of market failure), the government has to play a primary role in ensuring

the efficient working of the market. However, given the complexities inherent in determining the right prices as well as balancing the competing interests of various groups (consumers and producers), the international best practice is to establish an independent commission/authority with the mandate to regulate such economic activities. Banking and finance are activities that have historically required licencing and supervision from the central banks.

But with the opening of key monopolistic sectors – oil and gas, power and telecommunications – for private investment, it was imperative to establish such professional bodies that would be able to regulate them by taking on the price-setting role and ensuring the efficient working of large market players.

The establishment of the National Electric Power Authority (Nepra), the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) is based on this consideration.

Viewed in this perspective, economic reforms are indeed very beneficial for the economy. From 1947 to 1988, Pakistan's economy was one of the most regulated economies. It was essentially based on import substitution and most of its exports were of primary commodities. The fixed exchange rate regime created price stability, except for the steep devaluation of 1973 when prices skyrocketed. Our foreign exchange needs were frequently met from bilateral and multilateral sources. The Aid-to-Pakistan Consortium in Paris (comprising OECD countries) would be the shopping house where so-called donors would pick their preferred development projects for official development assistance (ODA).

In 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world was transformed as the Second World collapsed and a new world order emerged. This was the start of globalisation. Its defining characteristic was the free movement of capital across national borders and a steep fall in ODA. Concurrently, trading barriers were rapidly brought down and the stage was set for the so-called rules-based international trade to be supervised by the World Trade Organization.

Inevitably, Pakistan had to roll-out its own reforms programme. The catalyst for this was the first structural adjustment programme with the IMF, which was signed by the interim government in October 1988 but was enthusiastically adopted by Benazir's government after the elections were held in November 1988.

The economic landscape in Pakistan has since been altered beyond recognition. Intermittently, we have done more than a dozen reforms programmes with the IMF and other IFIs. Although we have an economy that is primarily driven by market forces and our regime is comparable to many other economies in the region, we have faced a number of problems in this journey:

First, the process has been bumpy as it tends to frequently terminate mid-way. Second, the sequencing of reforms has always been an issue, with many things done in haste and subsequent reforms either being missed or delayed beyond permissible limits. Third, the ownership of reforms had mostly been missing as the programmes were generally agreed during critical moments of urgency in seeking loans. After that moment, the diligence required to ensure beneficial outcomes from reforms was abandoned. Fourth, without a financing requirement from these IFIs, we hardly had any desire to reform on our own motion.

The most recent example is the recently completed IMF programme, which saw the implementation of a broad set of reforms. Its components, which are related to privatisation, efficiency in the energy sector, the fiscal deficit and the SBP financing for the budget, have all been abandoned remorselessly. With such failure in consolidations, reforms often create distortions of their own (which we will explain in a separate article).

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Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/246803-economic-reforms>

EDUCATION

To ease off pressure, FPSC to hold one paper a day By Riazul Haq

ISLAMABAD: To ease off the pressure on candidates appearing in Central Superior Services (CSS) examinations, the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) has decided to hold one paper a day, unlike the previous practice where the aspirants would appear in two papers a day.

The FPSC took the decision at a time when the federal cabinet is scheduled to take up the proposed restructuring of the commission after pressure mounted about the low passing rate in the examination.

“Yes, we the commission have decided to take up some steps and in the upcoming examinations one paper will be held each day,” FPSC Secretary Ameer Tariq Zaman confirmed to The Express Tribune, adding that it was one of the recommendations the commission deliberated upon.

CSS papers of 2016: FPSC report finds poor level of scholarship

Similarly, it has been decided that from now onwards the commission will aggregate the marks for English essay and précis/composition, according to Zaman.

Besides, the FPSC is also preparing a briefing for the federal cabinet which is scheduled to take up proposals for restructuring and reforms in the commission any time soon.

“The cabinet was scheduled to take up the agenda earlier this week, but due to unidentified reasons it was pulled out at the eleventh hour,” said an FPSC official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The official was optimistic that the issue may be taken up in the next two meetings.

Radical review of FPSC exam pattern proposed

The PM secretariat has suggested that the Establishment Division secretary should brief the cabinet on the issue. It is also expected that FPSC Chairperson Naveed Akram Cheema may also accompany the secretary in the cabinet meeting.

According to details, the FPSC will shed light on the declining results of the CSS and reasons thereof, including suggestions as a way out. The percentage of candidates qualifying for the written test declined from 9.75% in 2011 to 2.09% in 2016.

The commission is likely to propose changes in the curriculum of universities. It is one of the reforms that the commission has been suggesting in its last four annual reports.

Most public varsity students come up short in CSS

The decline in the results has not only created a furor in public but has also been talked about in parliament.

Recently, the Senate chairperson also formulated a special committee to review the CSS report of 2015 which also carried results that surprised many.

Earlier this week, the committee held its meeting under the chairmanship of Senator Muzaffar Hussain Shah. During the meeting, the FPSC chairperson was asked to come up with proposals and recommendations to improve the 'rotted and outdated' system of the FPSC.

Only 312 out of 9,301 candidates pass CSS exams

Cheema replied that they recruited candidates from those available. "We are not universities where we can prepare capable candidates," he had remarked.

The senator also asked whether the commission should take a separate exam for separate groups such as foreign services, audit and accounts and others. Cheema failed to make a reply and was asked to come up with some recommendations in the next meeting.

Meanwhile, the FPSC chairperson in a report submitted to President Mamnoon Hussain in August also lamented over the issues causing the low passing rate in the exam. In the report, he had also suggested how the result could be improved.

He said one of the major problems for the commission was finding the right officers for the right group due to the “declining education standards caused by sub-standard schooling, particularly in rural areas.”

Source : <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1556211/1-ease-off-pressure-fpsc-hold-one-paper-day/>

Random Thoughts : Education and Technology By Dr A Q Khan

Our country is going through a difficult time. But very few people, especially those in power, realise that most of our problems stem from the lack of sufficient education and expertise in science and technology.

All developed countries have one thing in common: a high standard of education and excellence in science and technology. On the contrary, in our country, 'technocrat' seems to be a dirty word in the mouths of rulers and politicians. They don't seem to understand that even countries with recent tremendous progress, like China, Turkey and Malaysia, owe their progress to a strong and sustained investment in education and technology.

Surah 20, Ayat 114 of the Holy Quran states that the Almighty ordered Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): "And say: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge". Though brief, this order encapsulates to the profoundest degree the Quranic position on knowledge and education. And our Holy Prophet (pbuh) himself prayed: "God! Grant me knowledge of the ultimate nature of things".

Here the word "knowledge" not only means an increase in information, but also entails awareness about the truth about the material universe. The world we live in, the land and the seas, the celestial bodies and our own bodies, the flora and fauna and the history of human societies has to be opened to us by countless pioneers. Many of these discoveries remain anonymous in the deep recesses of the past.

More recent history reveals man's compulsion to know whatever is to be known. As Aristotle said, "all men by nature desire to know". The Holy Quran (Surah 2 Ayat 31) states that: "Adam is taught the names of all things". The Holy Prophet (pbuh) ordered: "Strive to acquire knowledge, even if you have to go to China".

Inherent in this injunction is the abolition of linguistic and cultural prejudices – which so often work against the acquisition of knowledge – and an understanding of other people and cultures. As a result, the search for truth and its corollary – the acquisition of knowledge – is essentially part and parcel of Islam. It is, therefore,

neither incidental nor accidental that, from the seventh century onwards, there was an amazing pool of supreme talent in the Muslim World. Muslims searched for knowledge wherever it was to be had.

During the peak of Muslim power, the Arabs founded Baitul Hikmahs and Naimiyyas. These were institutions of advanced learning and were the equivalent of observatories and laboratories where scholars, artists, philosophers and scientists gathered from across the world. Many names from that famous era – Al-Farabi, Ibn-e-Sina, Ibn-e-Rushd, al-Khwarizmi, Razi, Al-Masudi, Wafa, Al-Biruni, al-Tusi, Nasiruddin, Ibn al-Nafis, Ibn-e-Baja, Ibn-e-Tufail and Al-Kindi – have reverberated through the ages. Ironically, given the importance of Aristotle and other Greeks to the advancement of knowledge in Europe, the largest body of scientific knowledge that the Western world acquired, was kept alive in the Arab World and was only passed into post-Dark Ages Europe in the late Middle Ages. The true heirs of Aristotle were the Muslims!

In the Holy Quran, we also read (in Surah 45, Ayat 13): “And He has subjected to you as from Him all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect”. It is incumbent on “those who reflect” to probe the possibilities present in the universe and harness them through technological development for the advancement of mankind.

With such a strong heritage, it is all the more tragic that Muslims today have been reduced to intellectual impotence and have fallen far behind in developing state-of-the-art science and technology. In the past, temporary technological superiority oscillated between the East and the West. But the gap was never as insurmountable as it is now for the Muslim world. It is the West that today sets the pace for scientific and technological development and Muslims are consigned to the ignominious status of underdevelopment.

Several factors contributed to the decline of Muslim intellectualism from approximately the 14th century onwards. First, the eruption of Mongol hordes into civilised Muslim kingdoms in Asia and the fall of the Muslim empires had a profound impact. Second, this period approximately coincided with the Renaissance. This propelled the Europeans to look outwards in search of knowledge and provided an impetus for the development of military technology that facilitated the colonisation of technologically-inferior lands. Meanwhile, the

Muslim world's social and political developments proved inimical to the spirit of enquiry and development. This ultimately rendered it helpless in the face of the Western European imperialism of the 18th and 19th centuries. This seriously disrupted the economic, cultural and educational development of the colonies, which were used only to serve the interest of the new rulers. The education of the 'native' to support the administrative machinery was selective and scientific and the industrial growth of the colonies was deliberately thwarted.

After the Second World War, the era of Western imperialism and colonialism came to an end and heralded the independence of the colonial territories. However, the acquisition of independent nationhood and the tumult that often accompanied it was not followed by economic and technological independence.

The vast wealth accumulated by imperialist countries and their exploitation of colonial territories, which fuelled the Industrial Revolution in the West, had ensured an economic disparity and technological deprivation between the colonies and the rulers. This disparity was deliberately reinforced in the post-colonial period to result in a division of countries into the developed world of the West and Japan and the underdeveloped – or the more charitable label of 'developing' – third world, which included all Muslim countries within its ambit.

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Digital Literacy And Education Reforms By Hammad Asif

With over 2.5 billion internet users and a global penetration rate of internet connectivity at 35%, the world today is highly interconnected, fast paced and technology savvy. Education in today's world comprises technology as the core element of curriculum as it deeply affects our lifestyles. Education also creates the utility of and manages appropriate technological processes and resources to facilitate learning. New platforms and technologies are helping stakeholders get better outcomes — even with fewer financial resources.

This infusion of computers and other digital technologies in programme development and implementation is on a steady rise. Each day new applications and devices are researched, developed and put to use in improving outcome quality. In many interesting ways, technology has been able to resolve complexities and challenges of public service in education. Innovation has ensured effectiveness in programme management, classroom learning experience and professional development in the education system.

Managing education reforms involves many complex tasks and daily challenges. To succeed in delivering essential educational goals in our digital information age, we have to employ the latest technological tools for training, online learning and access to information, resources and services. These tools help us do more by simplifying complex tasks. Prior to 2016, absenteeism was a major issue in public schools in K-P. Implementation of an online action management system with biometric attendance and other advanced processes led to a decline in this. The K-P government recovered Rs2.7 million from absent teachers.

The application of technological developments has an overwhelming impact on our daily activities. This transformation has redefined literacy, and our education system has to align with these changing needs. The K-P government has established 1,340 up-to-date IT labs in government schools across the province. Over 700 additional IT teachers and lab assistants have been recruited. These labs are equipped with the latest technology, interactive and virtual learning tools, and smart connected classroom tools.

K-P has now introduced learning methods using a combination of ICT learning tools. Around 1,100 interactive whiteboards (IWBs) have been installed in government higher secondary schools with solar panels backup. The IWBs offer immense potential to teachers to create as well as curate digital content. These technologies also promise to make the schools environmentally friendly.

Equipping public schools with educational technology has reversed the trend of school migration from public to private. More parents are responding to significant learning gains offered in public schools using digital technology. The pliability of blended learning has facilitated in creating a less stressful learning environment and offers a huge potential for learning gain.

Inclusivity lies at the core of education reforms. Every social group must have equal access to technology for a fair chance at availing opportunities of life in a digital world. Marginalisation of women is an issue of major concern and it reflects in gender statistics. Forty-one per cent of women in Pakistan are not active in the economy, with the lowest labour force participation in the world at 22 per cent.

The progress in changing these oppressive social norms means bridging the gap between women and technology. The K-P government has launched an initiative in 17 districts where 1,200 women from lower-income groups are being trained to use computers and technology in government schools during evening hours. Expert women trainers are hired to enable women enrollment that offers a world full of opportunities.

By making computer education easily available for girls, the K-P government is on its way to bring an educational revolution marked by technological advancement, which will go a long way in eliminating issues of concern in the education system. Such overhauling initiatives are necessary to make sure people are empowered technologically, financially and psychologically.

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Depoliticising The Higher Education By Munir Ahmed

The most cosmetic 18th Amendment in the Pakistan Constitution 1973 has proved gradual decline in most devolved subjects to the provinces. The 18th Amendment Act 2010 was passed in the National Assembly on April 8, 2011, that introduced a number of changes in the constitution and amended 102 articles and devolved 47 subjects to the exclusive legislative and executive domain of the provinces.

Education was one of the key subjects devolved to the provincial mandate. The concurrent legislative list that included education as a shared legislative jurisdiction at the federal and provincial level was omitted, and so far it had negative impact on education in general and higher education in particular. Having been unable to manage the secondary school education and had already earned bad name for their educational system that had proved to be a failure in many ways, the provinces were given the task of higher education too like many other 'devolved subjects'.

Six years on, the provinces are still in doldrums on fulfilling their international responsibilities on the devolved subjects. It seems that they don't have the resources and will to implement the 18th Amendment in its true spirit.

Same is the case with the higher education being apparently managed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) at the federal level while the provincial HECs are also popping up with the same mandate in the provinces. So, the situation is quite obvious that even a layman can well imagine the future of higher education in Pakistan in the presence of 'too many cooks' — one federal and presumably four provincial.

The rift has already taken off between the provinces of Punjab and Sindh versus federal on the scope of mandate, authority and resources. Certainly all three aforementioned elements are captivating, especially the lucrative financial resources that could bring more importance to even a lesser child — an undeserving chairman of any HEC if it has to be a non-competitive political decision.

Six years on, the provinces are still in the doldrums on fulfilling their international responsibilities on devolved subjects. It seems that they don't have the resources and the will to implement the 18th Amendment in its true spirit

We have seen immense politicising of every sector of national importance. Same is the case with the higher education. Before the 18th Amendment, all the four provinces were playing the role of watchdogs on the Higher Education Commission (HEC) at the federal level. Many believe the oversight on the provincial HECs would become dimmer. There is a firm opinion of education experts that political influence mounted on the provincial HECs would further decline the standard of higher education that is already not up to the expectation. There is evidently proved opinion that the standards have already declined in the recent years.

An audit report of the 2015-16 is also in circulation that reflects the incompetency of the federal HEC to spend the released funds. It states that Rs 1965 million were approved while Rs 770 million of funds were released for infrastructure development and the federal HEC could spend less than a half of it. Many say the decline of the HEC proficiency and performance is the result of favouritism and lack of oversight.

Two years back, the Islamabad Policy Research Institute conducted a consultation for a research on the post 18th Amendment changes in the federal HEC status. Let's have a look on the findings and recommendations.

18th amendment added 'standards in institutions for higher education and research, scientific and technical institutions' to the Federal Legislative List II. The amendment did not, however, touch two items on Federal Legislative List Part I — 'Federal agencies and institutes created for the purpose of doing research, for professional or technical training, or for the promotion of special studies,' and 'Education with respect to Pakistani students in foreign countries and foreign students in Pakistan.'

The functions of the HEC were not completely devolved to the provinces since some of its functions were handed over to five different ministries at the federal level with only few subjects left to be handled by the HEC.

The federal government placed the HEC under the Ministry of Professional and Technical Training. Prior to the 18th Amendment, HEC worked directly under the Prime Minister, and HEC chairman was equivalent to a federal minister in status.

The confusion needs to be resolved as to what shall be the functions of the provincial HECs and what shall still remain with federal HEC. The higher education is one of the subjects out of 47 that were devolved to provinces and continue to face devaluation in the hands of incompetent and resource-starved provinces marred by the political segregation and lack of drive to benefit the voiceless people.

Whether the 18th Amendment in the constitution was made in the blind love for provincial autonomy or it was a devolution step for a political scoring that erupted unforeseen consequences remains an unanswered question. Whatever the positive or negative consequences, the provinces and the federation are bearing or likely to bear in the days to come would make no difference to the 'historic image' of Mian Raza Rabbani, the proponent of the 18th Amendment. Whether nation would get the actual benefits of the 18th Amendment or remain in chaos for decades, he has been benefited with the chairmanship of the Senate of Pakistan and an unravel image.

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WORLD

The Real Reason Behind Trump's Angry Diplomacy in North Korea By Ramzy Baroud

To understand the United States' stratagem in the Pacific, and against North Korea in particular, one has to understand the fundamental changes that are under way in that region. China's clout as an Asian superpower and as a global economic powerhouse has been growing at a rapid speed. The US' belated 'pivot to Asia' to counter China's rise has been, thus far, quite ineffectual.

The angry diplomacy of President Donald Trump is Washington's way to scare off North Korea's traditional ally, China, and disrupt what has been, till now, quite a smooth Chinese economic, political and military ascendancy in Asia that has pushed against US regional influence, especially in the East and South China Seas.

Despite the fact that China has reevaluated its once strong ties with North Korea, in recent years, it views with great alarm any military build-up by the US and its allies. A stronger US military in that region will be a direct challenge to China's inevitable trade and political hegemony.

The US understands that its share of the world's economic pie chart is constantly being reduced, and that China is gaining ground, and fast.

The United States' economy is the world's largest, but not for long. Statistics show that China is blazing the trail and will, by 2030—or even sooner—win the coveted spot. In fact, according to an International Monetary Fund report in 2014, China is already the world's largest economy when the method of measurement is adjusted by purchasing power.

This is not an anomaly and is not reversible, at least any time soon.

The growth rate of the US economy over the past 30 years has averaged 2.4 percent, while China soared at 9.3 percent.

Citing these numbers, Paul Ormerod, an economist and a visiting professor at University College, London, argued in a recent article that “if we project these rates forward, the Chinese economy will be as big as the American by 2024. By 2037, it will be more than twice the size.”

It is no wonder why Trump obsessively referenced ‘China’ in his many campaigning speeches prior to his election to the White House, and why he continues to blame China for North Korea’s nuclear weapons program to this day.

As a business mogul, Trump understands how real power works, and that his country’s nuclear arsenal, estimated at nearly 7,000 nuclear weapons, is simply not enough to reverse his country’s economic misfortunes.

In fact, China’s nuclear arsenal is quite miniscule compared to the US. Military power alone is not a sufficient measurement of actual power that can be translated into economic stability, sustainable wealth and financial security of a nation.

It is ironic that, while the US threatens to ‘totally destroy North Korea,’ it is the Chinese government that is using sensible language, calling for de-escalation and citing international law. Not only did fortunes change, but roles as well. China, which for many years was depicted as a rogue state, now seems like the cornerstone of stability in Asia.

Prudent US leaders, like former President Jimmy Carter understand well the need to involve China in resolving the US-North Korean standoff.

In an article in the Washington Post, Carter, 93, called for immediate and direct diplomatic engagement with North Korea that involves China as well.

He wrote on October 4 that the US should “offer to send a high-level delegation to Pyongyang for peace talks or to support an international conference including North and South Korea, the United States and China, at a mutually acceptable site.”

A few days later, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, quoted Carter's article, and reasserted her country's position that only a diplomatic solution could bring the crisis to an end.

In a recent tweet, Trump claimed that "Presidents and their administrations have been talking to North Korea for 25 years, agreements made and massive amounts of money paid ... hasn't worked."

He alleged that North Korea has violated these agreements even "before the ink was dry", finishing with the ominous warning that "only one thing will work!", alluding to war.

Trump is a bad student of history. The 'agreements' he was referring to is the 'Agreed Framework' of 1994, signed between President Bill Clinton and Kim Jong-il—the father of the current leader Kim Jong-un. In fact, the crisis was averted when Pyongyang respected its side of the agreement. The US, however, reneged, argues Fred Kaplan in 'Slate'.

"North Korea kept its side of the bargain, the United States did not," Kaplan writes. "No light-water reactors were provided. (South Korea and Japan were supposed to pay for the reactors; they didn't, and the U.S. Congress didn't step in.) Nor was any progress made on diplomatic recognition."

It took North Korea years to react to the US and its partners' violation of the terms of the deal.

In 2001, the US invaded and destroyed Afghanistan. In 2003, it invaded Iraq, and actively began threatening a regime change in Iran. Iraq, Iran and North Korea were already blacklisted as the "axis of evil" in George W. Bush's infamous speech in 2002.

More military interventions followed, especially as the Middle East fell into unprecedented chaos resulting from the so-called Arab Spring in 2011. Regime change, as became the case in Libya, remained the defining doctrine of US foreign policy.

This is the actual reality that terrifies North Korea. For 15 years they have been waiting for their turn on the US regime change path, and their nuclear weapons program is their only deterring strategy in the face of US military interventions. The more the North Korean leadership felt isolated regionally and internationally, the more determined it became in obtaining nuclear devices.

This is the context that Trump does not want to understand. US mainstream media, which seems to loathe Trump in every way except when he threatens war or defends Israel, is following blindly.

Current news reports of North Korea's supposed ability to kill "90% of all Americans" within one year is the kind of ignorance and fear-mongering that has dragged the US into multiple wars, costing the economy trillions of dollars, while continuing to make bad situations far worse.

Indeed, a recent Brown University Study showed that, between 2001 and 2016, the cost of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan has cost the US \$3.6 trillion.

Perhaps, a better way of fending against the rise of China is investing in the US economy instead of wasting money on protracted wars.

But if a Trump war in North Korea takes place, what would it look like?

US Newsweek magazine took on this very disturbing question, only to provide equally worrying answers.

"If combat broke out between the two countries, American commanders in the Pacific would very quickly exhaust their stockpiles of smart bombs and missiles, possibly within a week," military sources revealed.

It will take a year for the US military to replenish their stockpile, thus leaving them with the option of "dropping crude gravity bombs on their targets, guaranteeing a longer and bloodier conflict for both sides."

Expectedly, North Korea would strike, at will, all of the US allies in the region, starting with South Korea. Even if the conflict does not escalate to the use of nuclear weapons, the death toll from such a war “could reach 1 million.”

Both Trump and Kim Jong-un are unsavory figures, driven by fragile egos and unsound judgement. Yet, they are both in a position that, if not reigned in soon, could threaten global security and the lives of millions.

Calls for diplomatic solutions made by Carter and China must be heeded, before it is too late.

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US Foreign Policy Evolution: Past & Present By Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi

Is America heading for a declining power? Whereas in the past the American power had demonstrated its capability of ensuring an integrated world order; presently, in the pretext of his America first doctrine or a policy of transformative narrative, president Trump seems to have actually sown the seeds of dissension and disarray thereof undermining US' role as the constructive global power. Unpredictability, surprise and diversion are the hallmarks of Trump's foreign policy volte-face. Nonetheless the future American power can no longer be sustainable by design of its current policies of creating a global turmoil.

Put historically and strategically, it appears that while being physically protected from the Old World, the United States had never really been isolated. The pivotal importance of the Greater Caribbean to the Mississippi River system became very significant for America to strategically dominate what has been called the American Mediterranean. And consequently the Greater Caribbean strengthened the potentiality of the entire Western Hemisphere. Subsequently the process of domination started with the very concept of the Monroe Doctrine, and was completed with the building of the Panama Canal.

Accordingly whilst becoming a dominant hemispheric power, the United States was then in a position to help determine the balance of power in other parts of the globe, and that is what the history of the 20th century was all about. And yet a US' role in the global affairs virtually indicates that fighting two world wars and the Cold War was about— not letting any power or alliance of powers dominate the Old World to the extent that the United States ruled the New World. More broadly, despite the fact that the Cold War was an era of bipolarity wherein the two power the US and the then USSR equally dominated the world. But in the post Cold War era, America significantly moved from its previously notions of balance of power—richly reflective in its policy deliverance in Middle East, East Asia, South Asia, and Europe. NATO's eastward enlargement has been an index of US' new power game started during the past administrations of Bill Clinton George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Veritably, the US' dreamt policy surge— in the post-Cold War era— to forestall the Russo-Sino influence in the global affairs has met a great fiasco since both China and Russia are driving significant clouts in today's world.

The US' quest for this ambition was based on the idea that Russia and China were heading irreversibly down the path of political and economic liberalization, and that they could eventually be induced to define their interests in a way compatible with America's own.

Christopher Davidson's latest book, 'Shadow Wars: The Secret Struggle for Middle East' exposes the dark side of US foreign policy. Most shockingly, his assertion—that US intelligence agencies continue to regard the Islamic State, like al-Qaeda before it, as a strategic but volatile asset to be wielded against their enemies—is absolutely irrefutable. There have been severe symptoms of hollowness and capriciousness regarding the US policy in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. And now Trump's national security team draws a strategy on the parallel lines of the old Richard Nixon era Kissinger team apprehending the threat of overpopulated poor people countries undermining US accession to the world's nutrient, energy and raw material resources?—?for which the solution could be to 'cauldronize' countries of strategic importance.

Apparently Trump took the initiative to move from the post-war orthodox doctrines – pursued by both Democratic and Republican presidents – such as building US-led alliances to expand the liberal democratic order. But Trump has unwisely nullified Obama's positive initiatives: The Iran Nuclear Deal, the Transpacific Trade Partnership (TTP), and the Paris Climate Accord. Trump has also changed the Cuban liberalisation initiative. By no reasonable accounts, these moves are positive. The three generals—the White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and US National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster—are mentors of new foreign policy strategy. Though McMaster is one of several powerful generals in Trump's orbit who hail from the Republican foreign policy establishment, Trump seems to have been equally sympathetic to the views of the war fanatics like the former White House Strategist Steve Bannon, who has been the pioneer of Trump's "America First" doctrine. And the growing division in establishment's three tiers—the US State Department, the Pentagon and the Capitol Hill—is indicative of an incoherent foreign policy.

There is, however, much truth in this analysis: a US' disdain for the global norms or international law clearly shown under the administrations of George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump accompanied by Washington's mysterious silence over the human right violations in Kashmir and Palestine, and its passive

interest in the conflict resolutions of these disputes, and its refractory stand on controversial war on terror, its illegal drone policy, and most significantly, Washington's escape from striking a balance of power system in South Asia -all these are alarming signs to deviate from the credo of a foreign policy, once ardently advocated and promised by US' founding fathers.

While in the 21st century America needs such a foreign policy which advocates legitimacy and balance of power, the question arises that despite a no vote by the American people with regard to the promiscuous military intervention of Trump's predecessors, will President Trump be able to transform the present character of his foreign policy from the Kissingerian deconstructive paradigm to a Wilsonian constructive model?

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What Saudi Revolution? | Editorial

They're talking about a Saudi revolution. And whether or not it sounds like a whisper is immaterial. We just hope that Pakistan doesn't get any ideas from Riyadh about how to conduct an anti-corruption drive, given how certain quarters here begrudge the judiciary its hard won independence.

In an unprecedented move, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has overseen the rounding up of numerous princes and ministers as well as business tycoons on charges of accruing ill-gotten gains. There are no small fry holed up in the kingdom's Ritz Carlton hotel. One of the most high-profile arrests is that of Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal. Worth an estimated \$18 billion, the well-known 'philanthropist' is the grandson of the first Saudi king as well as being the grandson of the Lebanon's first Prime Minister. Also caught in the net is Bakr bin Laden, an older brother of Osama, and said to be the 'true ruler of Jeddah'.

While it would be easy to get caught up in the thrill of it — it is worth keeping in mind that revolutions only occur when change comes from the bottom-up; when the precariat rises up and disrobes and displaces those old plutocrats who have always had new clothes, unlike many an emperor before them. What isn't a revolution is when the elite takes on the elite. Then, it's a power struggle; no more, no less.

And this is exactly what is happening in Saudi Arabia. True, there have been rather bold moves towards cultural 'reform'; such as promises to lift the ban on women driving, giving the go-ahead to hold concerts and opening up the notoriously inward looking society to tourism. But make no mistake, this is about the economic reform that lies at the heart of the Saudi Vision 2030. This, of course, is the Crown Prince's pet project. Thus recent developments in the kingdom have everything to do with making way for his smooth ascension to the throne; already the 32-year-old has the last say on matters military, foreign, economic and social. It is also a prudent move aimed at keeping a tight hold of the kingdom's purse strings. The war in Yemen doesn't come cheap; already the price tag is said to be in the billions. Moreover, it won't hurt the Saudi economy to have any of the seized assets registered as state property, which the Interior ministry has said is already on the cards. Especially not as it sits and watches as the international community, most notably the unquiet American President, is going on a charm (or in the case of the

latter, a Twitter) offensive in a bid to get Riyadh to float part of state-owned oil giant Saudi Aramco on international markets. That this is the world's most valuable company means that Donald Trump got it right when he said that the Crown Prince and his father, King Salman, "know exactly what they're doing". *

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Another Leak | Editorial

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) has released another cache of documents on offshore wealth maintained by high-net worth individuals from across the globe.

Dubbed Paradise Papers, the collection has 13.4 million documents, most of them from an offshore law firm, Appleby. Those mentioned include U2 lead singer Bono, Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan, and Queen Elizabeth II.

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's name has also appeared in the leaks.

In its response, Appleby has denied any wrongdoing and has held that it advises clients on legitimate and lawful ways to conduct their business. It has assured full cooperation with any legitimate and authorised investigation into the leaks.

That the leaks do not contain incriminating information in and of themselves is obvious and has been acknowledged by the ICIJ as well. As with the Panama Papers leaks, the issue at hand is whether or not these companies have been used to avoid taxes or launder money — which is a violation of the law. For those mentioned in the leaks who have held public offices, like Shaukat Aziz in Pakistan's case, another issue of relevance is whether this offshore wealth was declared, as required under the Pakistani law, to the Election Commission of Pakistan at the time of the election.

All of the foregoing are issues concerned with violations of the law and ought to be dealt with accordingly.

The tax watchdog has already stated that it is investigating the matter. Like it did in the case of Panama Papers, it is issuing notices to Pakistani citizens mentioned in the latest leaks, asking them to clarify their positions. The slow pace of this process is a matter of concern. The FBR needs to expedite the inquiry. So far, the board and other authorities haven't made any headway in the matter of those named in the Panama Papers either.

While the law has to take its course in a timely manner, we must also revisit existing laws to ensure that there aren't any loopholes that enable laundering or tax evasion. For the leaks to be of any use, the authorities must undertake the aforementioned measures in a timely manner.

Meanwhile, the media must report the issue in a responsible, ethical and accurate manner. The leaks ought to be reported as potential evidence of offshore wealth that does not incriminate those mentioned in anyway. *

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Syrian Conflict — Another View By S M Hali

The Syrian conflict has entered its seventh year, claiming more than 465,000 Syrian lives, caused injuries to over a million, while over 12 million Syrians — half the country's prewar population — have been displaced from their homes. Thousands of the displaced Syrians are spending lives in squalor; most remain unsure of ever returning home. After world conscience was moved by the images of Syrian children perishing in their attempts to escape the ravages of war, several European countries accepted some of the displaced Syrians. Unfortunately, in the garb of Syrian refugees, some terrorists also slipped in with the asylum seekers, causing disorder through sporadic terror attacks. This affected the spirit of hospitality being offered to the Syrians, adding to their woes.

The Syrian conflict is an offshoot of the Arab Spring, which erupted in 2011, toppling Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. Civil unrest began in Syria in March 2011 and gradually propelled out of control.

Independent analysts like Chris Kanthan, author of Syria—War of Deception, in his exposé: 'Libya, Syria, Ukraine—Same Playbook, Same Puppet Masters' published on November 7th 2017, point out that the chaos and mayhem in Ukraine, Libya and Syria is a clever but ruthless playbook of regime-change. He opines that the coup is carried out in many stages: Stage 1: Planned Protests; Stage 2: Protesters killed, leading to outrage and UN resolutions/sanctions; Stage 3: Armed mutiny and attempts to force the government out; Stage 4: If Stage 3 fails, sponsor a full-fledged civil war to overthrow the government.

The difference in Syria is that Russia stepped in to stem the rot and check the forcible regime change. Unfortunately, some Muslim states, critics of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, also supported a regime change. Weapons and money poured from the outside to fuel the civil war. Less than 1 per cent of the population joined the Syrian armed militia. Thus the 'revolution' faltered after a few months, and tens of thousands of foreign jihadists were flown into Syria, resulting in the emergence of a new threat: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which captured nearly seventy per cent of Syria. ISIL wreaked havoc in the territories under its occupation, slaughtering the civilian population, looting and plundering centuries old heritage.

The tables turned in September 2015, after Russian military intervention in the Syrian Civil War, after an official request by the Syrian Government for military help against rebel and jihadist groups.

Turkey joined Russia in targeting the ISIL but after a mishap in which Turkish Air Force shot down a Russian Air Force SU-24 on 24 November 2015, the relations soured temporarily but were renewed after intense diplomatic efforts on both sides. The US joined the fray by supporting the Syrian opposition which added to the chaos.

Aided by Russian and Turkish forces, Syrian government forces managed to liberate the territory from ISIL, capturing the town of Abu Kamal, the last major stronghold of Islamic State on 8 November.

A large part of the terrorist arsenal found in Mayadin, Syria, comprised weapons, supplied by the NATO countries, including those manufactured in the US, Belgium and the UK

The fourth round of the intra-Syrian talks, held in Kazakhstan's capital Astana in May 2017 finalised an agreement for creating four de-escalation zones across Syria, with Russia, Iran, and Turkey serving as guarantor states. Three of the safe zones have been created to date in Syria's central province of Homs, in the Eastern Ghouta area of the southern Rif Dimashq province, and a south western militant-controlled stretch along the border with Jordan. They have sharply reduced fighting in the conflict zones. Concerted efforts are on for the creation of a fourth zone in Syria's northern province of Idlib, which borders Turkey and is under control of al-Nusra Front Takfiri militants.

According to Press TV, Russian President Vladimir Putin, at a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart in Turkey's capital Ankara during a visit to the country, pointed out that the de-escalation zones have created the "de facto conditions necessary for the end of the fratricidal war in Syria and the final defeat of terrorists as well as for the Syrian people's return to normal life."

Unfortunately, the plot thickens as according to Russian News Agency TASS, the Syrian military with the support of the Russian space forces seized the largest

warehouse of weapons and armored vehicles of the ISIL from the just liberated city of Mayadin. Until recently, Mayadin was the most powerful fortified area of terrorists in Eastern Syria and was awarded the status of 'capital' of the ISIS.

The Syrian military took a group of reporters to Mayadin, where they saw satellite communication systems, radar equipment, medical devices and a plant for the production of drones used by the fighters for reconnaissance and precision bombing. The reporters were shocked to note that a large part of the terrorist arsenal comprised weapons, adopted by the NATO countries including latest models of weapons manufactured in the USA, Belgium and the UK. The Syrian conflict will end only if the Occident stops aiding the terrorists.

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Contradictions In US-China Relations By Lal Khan

During his first visit to China last week, Donald Trump lavished praise on Xi: “You are a very special man.” The audience couldn’t quite believe what they were hearing as these Presidents’ were meant to be strategic rivals. It is perhaps Trumps most significant U-turns since his campaign and initial weeks of his presidency. Even before being elected, Trump had blustered that the US needed to “slap down China.” But Obama’s so-called pivot to Asia was driven by the same appraisal. He had blamed China for America’s economic woes and threatened to impose a 45 percent tariff on Chinese imports.

Paradoxically the Donald Trump visiting Beijing in November could only muster the strength to urge China’s Helmsman, Xi to “work very hard” on North Korea’s denuclearisation. Xi responded that both sides would “continue to work towards” fully implementing UN sanctions and ‘enduring peace’ on the Korean peninsula. On China’s trade surplus, Mr Trump surprised many more when he said, “did not blame China... for taking advantage of another country for the benefit of its citizens... I give China great credit.”

Xi reciprocated with China agreeing to further lower entry barriers for US banking, insurance, and finance sectors, and gradually reduce vehicle tariffs. However China’s advantageous position against the Americans was evident during Xi’s hospitality in the Forbidden City. The Economist, commented, “The courtiers of the Communist Party have lost little of the ancient art of feigned deference... The Chinese also bore gifts: trade deals worth over \$200bn, covering everything from jet engines and car parts to shale gas. Most of the pledges were memoranda of understanding: expressions of intent, not enforceable contracts. Many concerned things the Chinese would have done anyway.”

However the relations between China and the United States are fraught with contradictions. On one hand there are mutual political, economic, and security interests. China is the largest foreign creditor of the United States while the US provides the largest investment and marketing to the Chinese ruling elite. Direct investment by the US in China covers a wide range of manufacturing sectors including Foxcon that produces the parts of Apple’s I-Phones and other info tech

gadgets. US companies have entered agreements establishing more than 20,000 equity joint ventures, contractual joint ventures, and wholly foreign-owned enterprises. More than 100 US-based multinationals have projects in China, some with multiple investments. In 2016, the US investments made in China were valued at approximately 92.48 billion US dollars. The Chinese investment in USA tripled to 45.6 billion dollars in the same year.

On the other hand the two largest economies in the world remain in dispute over territorial issues in the South China Sea and US militarisation and diplomatic support of Taiwan. But the tighter control of the market and economy and limitations for the western corporate capital has been the core issue of west's anxiety against the Chinese regime. Their interests also clash on their foreign investment targets and venture capital strategies in different parts of the world. Although China had few options other than to continue to buy United States Treasury bonds but it condemned the US monetary policy of quantitative easing responding to S&P's downgrade of US credit rating. However with the steep fall in China's own growth rates after 2010 and an economic slowdown it also resorted to borrowing and has accumulated a debt to GDP ratio of 255 percent, one of the highest in the world. It's hyper Keynesianist policies and extravagant investments national and overseas, worry world bourgeois strategists, as today's China has become a key player in global capitalism. The US trade deficit with China exceeded \$347 billion in 2016 and was the United States' largest bilateral trade deficit.

Trump had little choice but to acclaim Xi in the wake of the waning influence of US imperialism. Despite having a much larger military force and arms spending than China's, the wars USA has been imbibed in to preserve its imperial prestige and strategic domination have exhausted its economic and military strength with demoralisation of its forces by the defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Brookings Institute wrote, "The US ability to leverage its greater national power in its relationship with China has for a long time been less than many commentators believe, but it certainly has diminished now. Trump is playing cards with a weaker hand..."

At present, the Chinese economy seems to be less troubled in comparison to most other larger world economies. But China's economic triumph is a false euphoria that its supporters fancy. The reality is that while US imperialism is in historical

decline, the rise of China is also brittle and dangerously credit financed in this epoch of a decaying world capitalist system. China's capitalism is neither conventional nor healthy in its foundation. The mutual dependence of the US and the Chinese ruling elites compels them to make compromises and give concessions but at the same time there are inherent contradictions between these competing powers. The Chinese elite is fostering Anti-American sentiment. Xi may be subtle in his rivalry rhetoric but his global ambitions are not getting any moderate.

These relations are prone to greater conflicts as the crisis exacerbates. These rulerships cannot resort to a full-fledged war but their proxy conflicts and trade wars will aggravate in the coming period. Even if they can only negotiate temporary accords, these will be fragile. However, what these regimes are really worried about are the consequences on the domestic front. In this period of historical decline of capitalism not only the prospect of a healthy recovery of the US economy is grim but the rise of China's warped capitalism is also beleaguered. Trump's policies can provoke a workers revolt in the USA but the Chinese proletariat — the largest in the world — shall also rise up in a greater and a stronger wave of the class struggle as the crisis worsens and the state resorts to starker repression. Social instability in both the 'super-powers' will inevitably exacerbate. Uneven patterns of socioeconomic growth are bound to implode the seething class contradictions. Revolutionary storms will erupt sooner rather than later.

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No End in Sight in Afghanistan | Editorial

During his election campaign, US president Donald Trump had called the American war in Afghanistan a waste of American money, effort and lives. However, once elected, Trump changed his mind on the war in Afghanistan. First, he vowed to increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan. Now, reports have emerged that the US troops stationed in the restive country have been allowed to participate in joint operations with Afghan forces and to call in airstrikes when needed. Senior US military officials have commented that this approach is modelled on US operations in Iraq and Syria.

It is now clear that the US has no plans to exit Afghanistan in the short- to medium-term. But what remains unclear is whether the state with the largest military in the world has any viable strategy for ending conflict and restoring stability in the region.

In September this year, US forces dropped 751 bombs against the Taliban and the Islamic State (IS). This was an increase in the number of bombs dropped by 50 percent since August.

The sole reliance of force is not going to solve the Afghan problem. The employment of military means is going to yield in loss of more civilian lives. This will only harm the cause of fighting extremist militias. Those losing their relatives in incursions led by the US and Afghan forces are unlikely to have a favourable opinion about the US or the Kabul administration.

This new strategy of involving US troops in combat missions is going to backfire at home in the US as well. The American public does not like it when their soldiers lose their lives in foreign conflict zones. Trump's approval rating has already hit a record low.

Capacity building of Afghan forces and intelligence sharing with them remains the best possible option for the US and other regional players to fight various militias that have found safe havens in the country.

In this regard, the Trump administration will do well to reconsider their recent posturing towards Iran and Pakistan. Trump has antagonised Iran through the 'decertification' of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (otherwise known as the

Iran nuclear deal). He has also strained US-Pakistan ties following the recent policy announcement foreseeing a greater Indian role in Afghanistan.

For lasting peace in Afghanistan, the US administration needs to revisit its regional policy such that neighbouring states are involved in an effort to strengthen Afghan troops' capacity to secure the territory. *

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Conflicts And Peace By Abdul Sattar

Sanity seems to be prevailing in the Syrian conflict. The two most powerful leaders of the world – US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin – agree that the Syrian conflict cannot be resolved through military means.

After meeting briefly on the sidelines of a regional summit in Vietnam last week, the two leaders said there was “no military solution” to the war in Syria. The statement, issued by officials from both sides, said the two presidents had made progress on Syria, a country that has been battered by six years of civil war.

It is disappointing to see that powerful world leaders only spring into action after a lot of blood has already been spilled. This has also happened in the case of Syria where, according to the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR), 470,000 people were killed until March last year with up to 1.9 million Syrians injured. This means that more than a tenth of the population has either been killed or wounded. Even the conservative estimate puts the death toll as 250,000. In addition to this, the conflict has displaced than six million people within the country while another four million have been forced to seek shelter as refugees in other countries. Life expectancy in the hapless country also dropped from 70.5 years in 2010 to an estimated 55.4 years in 2015. The war has cost a whopping \$226 billion to the Syrian economy.

When the civil war erupted, thousands of militants, many of them from Western countries, started flooding into conflict zones controlled by Isis. Blinded by their hatred for Bashar al-Assad, these countries did not come up with an effective policy to at least prevent the flux of the jihadis pouring into Syrian territories. The international community turned a blind eye towards these militants until the extremely violent extremists started slitting the throats of foreign hostages, burning people alive and raping hapless Yazidi women. No question was raised over the overt and covert support to Al-Qaeda elements by Western powers.

In the name of fighting Isis, the US and its allies were alleged to have targeted the Syrian troops that were trying to eliminate the very elements that the Americans were claiming to fight. Washington was blamed for bombing Syrian government posts, thereby allowing Isis remnants to escape. If the Russians and Americans were opposed to the extremist group, then why was no joint front formed to stamp

out the menace? Why did anti-Isis forces not unite for this purpose? Why was action not taken in time – action that could have saved several millions people from the life of death and misery that they are condemned to lead now?

While the statement of these two world leaders over the situation in Syria is encouraging, one wonders why such approach is not applied to other conflicts as well. Why are the two leaders silent over the devastating invasion of Yemen by Saudi Arabia? More than 10,000 people have perished in that war-torn country since the Saudi-led coalition launched an attack in March 2015. According to the UN, nearly 19 million people – 80 percent of Yemen's population – are in need of humanitarian aid; more than three million have been displaced.

A catastrophic humanitarian crisis is already unfolding in the hapless country where Saudi bombardment has decimated water and sanitation system, triggering an outbreak of various diseases including cholera. According to the World Health Organization's count of October 1, there were 777,227 suspected cases of cholera in the war-torn country, taking only about six months to reach those alarming high numbers. More than half of the cholera patients are under the age of 18 and 26 percent are under the age of five. It took Haiti seven years to report over 800,000 cholera cases but in Yemen it happened within six months, thanks to the ruthless bombardment that has destroyed the infrastructure of the country.

The international community has adopted a criminal silence over this devastating war. Instead of extinguishing the flames of war, the so-called civilised countries further stoked it by lavishing arms deals on the conservative kingdom. Ignoring the starving faces of the Yemeni masses, US President Donald Trump visited the kingdom with killing machine deals worth over \$300 billion. And the UK's arms sale to the Saudi government have increased 50 times since the launch of the invasion in March 2015.

Washington threw its blanket support behind the Saudi ruling elite that now appears to be planning to trigger another conflict in Lebanon, while Moscow is reluctant to dissuade Iran from reining in Tehran's proxy in Yemen. Even China, which is pumping over \$900 billion into the ambitious 'One Belt One Road' project, is trying to keep itself aloof from these raging wars, ignoring the fact that the flames of war sometimes tend to be very unpredictable.

As if these conflicts were not enough, the US is raising the spectre of war and destruction in the Korean Peninsula. The fear-mongering that Trump spread during his recent visit to South East Asia was aimed at selling more American arms to its rich allies like Japan. The Oval Office incumbent did not hide his intentions. During his recent visit to Japan, Trump while pointing at Japan's PM Shinzo Abe, said: "He will shoot (North Korea's) missiles out of the sky when he completes the purchase of lots of equipment from the United States. One very important thing is that Prime Minister Abe is going to be purchasing massive amounts of (US-made) military equipment, as he should. We make the best by far....it's a lot of jobs for us and a lot of safety for Japan."

This statement by Trump clearly indicates that even if the Syrian crisis is over and the much-awaited-peace has been brought back to the war-torn country, the pernicious tentacles of death and destruction will find another battlefield because the gargantuan appetite of the military-industrial complex is not likely to wither away any time soon. The merchants of death and destruction, who control the world through their businesses, might force the international community to turn a blind eye to the simmering tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the spectre of a devastating war in Korean peninsula and a possible conflict in Lebanon. Once the flames of war have engulfed these countries, they will again come up with their arms deals to bless the world with misery, death and destruction.

Trump and Putin must agree that it is not only the Syrian conflict that needs no military solution but that no armed solution is workable anywhere. Both countries are the biggest manufacturers of arms and possess the most lethal agents of destruction. They should not only get rid of those arms but should also muster up support for peaceful resolutions of conflicts. They need to play their due role along with China, the European Union, Brics and other regional bodies and international bodies in seeking a peaceful solution of armed conflicts across the world. One way to achieve this is to make a commitment to seek the gradual dismantling of the military-industrial complex, not only that of US only but of all the states of the world.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/244437-Conflicts-and-peace>

Trump's Asia Tour By Rizwan Ghani

TRUMP'S tour has yielded more to the world in 12 days than what America had gained in last two decades. Trans-Pacific deal is going to go ahead without US. Abe is trying his best to make the deal successful but local Japanese media has raised questions about the future of the deal in the long run. With US withdrawn, the size of deal has already fallen to 13 percent of world's economy from original 40 percent. Internal divisions have already surfaced. Blaming Malaysia and Vietnam as obstacles is not going to help deal. The fractures in 11 nations TPP deal will have negative impact on Abe's economic plan. Trump's APEC speech in which he blamed Asian countries for taking away jobs, factories and industries out of America has weakened Abe's position who had promised prosperous strong Japan to his voters.

Beijing has proposed regional market solutions as an alternate to TPP. Economic experts have termed departure of US from TPP as a 'Rebalance' in trade in favor of Asia. The Belt and Road projects with Russia on board, Tokyo will have to review its China policy in its national interest and the larger interest of the region. Without mending fences with Beijing, Tokyo cannot protect its economy and security interest in the region. On the other hand, Trump has proved to be shrewd businessman. He used TPP, Sino-Japan territorial disputes and South China Sea situation to sign \$400bn deals with Japan (\$150bn) and China (\$250bn). With \$350bn deal in ME, Trump has already managed \$750bn worth of mega deals in his first year in office. It will bring jobs and business for America. The deals will finance his tax break plan to rich Americans and given hope to worker. He gave commercial issues priority over security issues in case of Tokyo and Beijing, which is good diplomacy.

However, based on the same yardstick Trump's India policy is deeply flawed and headed to fail. Obama Pivot to Asia with "string of pearls" nations supporting US in controlling waterways to China is no more there. Trump called them constellation of free nations. He said that I will protect America's interest under America first policy and other countries are also free to look after their own interests. Trump did not object to Duterte remarks in which he rejected Trump's offer of meditation on South China Sea by stating that the issue be left alone. Duterte also said that we have to be friends and there is no need to confront China and rest of the world. Also, Duterte revealed that Chinese President Xi Jinping signaled to him during a meeting that he wanted peace in the region and oppose any loss of life in a war.

Trump said he wants free and open Pacific. ASEAN has given a clear message that peace (not war) will be given priority in the region.

Trump Danang speech was all about US-Asia economic relations. He did not stress on renewed partnerships and America's military alliances. India will try to make a lot from its alliance with US, Australia and Japan. Trump's Asia message is clear. The core interests of America are trade, investment and economic relations. Trump's insistence on America first means that he will fight for country's core interests. Experts opine that Trump will not hesitate to challenge countries that have trade deficits with US including India. With US-India standoff on H1B visa and trade in future, Trump-Modi cooperation will not last very long. The Indian business community will force Modi to review its anti-regional approach. Modi's efforts to improve Indian economy have failed. India cannot survive in the region by boycotting the regional development plans in an interrelated world. Like any other country in the region, Delhi will also have to build healthy relations with its neighbors to have healthy business relations in the region and with America under Trump.

After Trump's ASEAN speech, Tillerson statements on Pakistan have become irrelevant. The core policy of Trump is commerce and trade. There is no clash of commercial interest between both countries. Our business community should invite Trump to sign fair, transparent trade deals that serve workers of both countries with combined market of 550 million people. If corrupt Pakistani elite can invest hundreds of billions overseas and stash \$500 in overseas accounts why can't America and Pakistan have fair trade deals of much greater values? Trump should be able to see through the anti-Pakistan propaganda and avail the opportunity of building long term Pak-US commerce and trade relations in the larger interest of the region. Finally, if Trump manages to follow his ASEAN speech, Trump's Asia tour will begin important developments in the region in commerce and trade, anti-corruption and anti-drug measures.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/trumps-asia-tour/>

A World Without Nukes By Rizwan Asghar

At long last, the advocates of nuclear disarmament have a reason to be optimistic about their journey towards achieving the goals of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). This is not only a great win for nonproliferation activists across the globe but also provides fresh momentum for the efforts towards total nuclear disarmament.

Pessimists generally contend that nuclear weapons cannot be un-invented and there would always be room for cheating due to the absence of an international authority to enforce international laws. Yet, if the global community can garner an urgently-needed political will to achieve universal compliance with non-proliferation norms, the goal of 'general' and 'complete' nuclear disarmament may not be beyond our reach. Nuclear nonproliferation is an idea whose time has finally come. In July, more than 120 countries were able to approve the historic treaty banning nuclear weapons despite strong opposition on the part of the nuclear-weapon states. Countries all over the world are taking their commitment to the objective of nuclear disarmament seriously. There is unquestionably a growing realisation that nuclear weapons are no longer symbols of military strength due to the rapid decline of interstate conflicts in the post-cold war period. The only thing they do represent is a legitimate threat to human existence on this planet.

Many nations continue to spend billions of dollars on their nuclear forces, which do not address our real security threats. According to a recent estimate by Congressional Budget Office, the US will be spending more than \$1.2 trillion over the next three decades to modernise its triad of submarine, land, and bomber-based nuclear forces. Once all countries reach an agreement to disarm themselves of nuclear weapons, these resources can be spent for more useful purposes.

A major challenge faced by the current nuclear non-proliferation regime is that it is neither comprehensive nor universal. The regime does not effectively cover the uncontrolled fissile material which is used for military purposes by countries that possess nuclear weapons. In addition, nuclear weapons material in non-NPT

nuclear weapon states – Pakistan, India and Israel – is not safeguarded by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Any effective NPT must be universal because the likelihood of noncompliant states secretly developing nuclear weapons will continue to push their adversaries toward undermining the regime by withdrawing from it in order to acquire nuclear capability. In order to strengthen the credibility of any future NPT, all countries, including the five NPT member states, should be subjected to the same safeguards so that any feeling of discrimination is removed. Such an agreement must also establish a binding mechanism to immediately take action against any state that violates the treaty without the threat of a veto from the UN Security Council (UNSC).

The current nuclear security framework and the IAEA's verification capabilities do not cover the materials used for military purposes. The new regime must also fill this gap so that terrorists are denied any small possibility of getting their hands on nuclear materials. A new regime can be built on the foundations of the existing institutions and treaties. The aforementioned criteria can be included in the existing NPT framework in order to benefit from the robust norms against nuclear proliferation.

The IAEA must be given more authority to verify compliance with these criteria in the new nuclear security regime. The new regime must require all countries to provide information about the exact quantities of fissile materials in their possession. Furthermore, all existing initiatives should be strengthened to reduce the possibility of a breach in the security of nuclear materials to a minimum. All states must also take necessary measures to implement the 2004 UNSC resolution passed to prevent unauthorised entities from gaining access to sensitive materials.

Many other international treaties – such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) – which are currently awaiting the required consent of member states, must be ratified and implemented in letter and spirit. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is our best hope to make sure that we keep taking concrete steps towards eliminating nuclear weapons.

While talking to this writer in Moscow last month, Dr Lassina Zerbo, the executive secretary of the CTBTO, said that the CTBT will contribute to the confidence-building measures that are necessary to strengthen the existing norms against nuclear weapons and help prepare the ground for the emergence of more anti-

nuclear norms. Thanks to the efforts made by the CTBTO, it has become quite impossible for the US and many other nuclear states to resume nuclear testing without stirring strong condemnation from the global community.

Historically speaking, Pakistan has linked its position on the CTBT to India's position. After the 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan's then prime minister Nawaz Sharif stated in his address to the UN General Assembly session that: "Pakistan has consistently supported the conclusion of a CTBT for over 30 years...there is no reason why the two countries cannot adhere to the CTBT. In a nuclearised South Asia, [the] CTBT would have relevance if Pakistan and India are both parties to the treaty". However, there are reasons to believe that if prospects for the CTBT's ratification become brighter, Pakistan might change its position in favour of the treaty.

There is a strong imperative to engage with the issue of nuclear proliferation from a humanitarian perspective and produce policy initiatives that can help win the negotiations on the ratification of the CTBT and other multilateral disarmament goals. Let's make ourselves the last generation that lives under the shadow of nuclear weapons.

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The Meaning of Sharp Power By Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig

The term “soft power” has become a political science catch-all for forms of influence that are not “hard” in the sense of military force. According to Joseph Nye’s original definition, a country’s hard power is based on coercion, largely a function of its military or economic might. Soft power, in contrast, is based on attraction, arising from the positive appeal of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies—as well as from a vibrant, independent civil society.

As the Cold War era faded, analysts, journalists, and policymakers in democratic countries came to view influence efforts from authoritarian countries, such as China and Russia, through the familiar lens of soft power. But some of their techniques, although not hard in the openly coercive sense, are not really soft, either.

Contrary to some of the prevailing analysis, the influence wielded by Beijing and Moscow through initiatives in the spheres of media, culture, think tanks, and academia is not a “charm offensive,” as the author Joshua Kurlantzick termed it in his book *Charm Offensive: How China’s Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. Nor is it an effort to “share alternative ideas” or “broaden the debate,” as the editorial leadership at the Russian and Chinese state information outlets suggest about themselves. It is not principally about attraction or even persuasion; instead, it centers on distraction and manipulation. These powerful and ambitious authoritarian regimes, which systematically suppress political pluralism and free expression to maintain power at home, are increasingly applying the same principles internationally.

Russia and China have blocked external political and cultural influence at home while preying upon the openness of democratic systems abroad.

Over the past decade, China has spent tens of billions of dollars to shape public opinion and perceptions around the world, employing a diverse toolkit that includes thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, the development of media enterprises with global reach, and educational programs. The most notable of these is the ever-expanding network of Confucius Institutes,

which are controversial because of the opacity with which they operate on Western university campuses; they “function as an arm of the Chinese state and are allowed to ignore academic freedom,” a 2014 statement from the American Association of University Professors argued.

During roughly the same period, the Russian government accelerated its own efforts in this sphere. In the mid-2000s, the Kremlin launched the global television network Russia Today (since rebranded as the more unassuming RT), built up its capacity to manipulate content online, increased its support for state-affiliated policy institutes, and more generally cultivated a web of influence activities—both on and offline—designed to alter international views to its advantage.

Although Russia and China undertake some activities that can credibly fall into the category of normal public diplomacy—such as traditional music or dance performances—the nature of these countries’ political systems invariably and fundamentally color their efforts. In the case of China, for example, educational and cultural initiatives are accompanied by an authoritarian determination to monopolize ideas, suppress alternative narratives, and exploit partner institutions. The Confucius Institutes, for example, purport to be akin to Goethe Institutes, the German cultural associations, and Alliance Française, the French version, but are closely coordinated by Hanban, the Chinese government’s Confucius Institute Headquarters. Their embeddedness on university campuses around the world—including in many democracies—has been found to put those institutions’ academic freedom at risk through financial entanglement, pressure to self-censor, and a deliberate avoidance or one-sided framing of topics sensitive to the Chinese authorities, such as Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang. And such pressure could soon increase; the enshrinement of “Xi Jinping Thought,” that is, of President Xi Jinping’s worldview, in the country’s constitution leave little doubt about how extensively the regime hopes to tighten its grip on the public sphere.

The rulers of Russia, a less wealthy and powerful state, seem content to propagate the idea that their kleptocratic regime—whose paramount leader is rapidly approaching two decades in power—is a normal member of the international community and that its actions and statements are no less valid than those of democracies. As the Kremlinologist Lilia Shevtsova observed in an article in the *Journal of Democracy*, “for the Kremlin, ideas are instrumental. If an action is deemed necessary, ideas will be found to justify it. An atomized people is there to

be confused and given the impression that everything is fluid and relative. Thus the system's propaganda may claim, 'Russian values do not differ dramatically from European values. We belong to the same civilization,' only to posit a moment later that the West is Russia's main enemy."

At the outset, many observers breezily dismissed Russian and Chinese government efforts to build more modern and sophisticated tools of international influence. In 2010, one analyst in the *Columbia Journalism Review* observed of Russia's ambitions at the time that it is "unlikely there will be a need for the kind of shrill propaganda outlet that RT has been," especially considering that "after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no ideology to propagate." And another, in the *Washington Post* that same year, noted that there was a "dollop of Rube Goldberg" in the missteps of China's efforts.

Indeed, authoritarians' television and online initiatives, whose programming and editorial lines were at first stilted or disjointed, were seen as autocratic vanity projects or otherwise not worthy of serious consideration. But today's reality is different—and the world's democracies need to recognize that fact.

Skeptics' dismissiveness of authoritarian influence activities led to a dangerous complacency, allowing the authoritarians, through trial and error, to refine their existing efforts and develop a much more powerful array of influence techniques. Critical to their success has been their exploitation of a glaring asymmetry: in an era of hyperglobalization, the regimes in Russia and China have raised barriers to external political and cultural influence at home while simultaneously preying upon the openness of democratic systems abroad.

Moscow and Beijing's adjustments have been gradual but systematic. Russian officials, for their part, determined that they did not need to convince the world that their autocratic system was appealing in its own right. Instead, they realized that they could achieve their objectives by making democracy appear relatively less attractive. As former RT presenter Liz Wahl, who left the station in protest over its jaundiced coverage, has said, "After a while working for RT, you learn what stories management likes and how to tackle stories in a manner that the bosses find favorable. You come to learn that these stories must conform to a basic principle: make the U.S. and the West look bad. In doing so, you make Russia look better by comparison." Russian information manipulation efforts have thus constituted a

relentless, multidimensional attack on the prestige of democracies—the United States and leading European Union countries especially—and on the ideas underlying democratic systems.

Meanwhile, as China has dramatically expanded its economic interests and business footprint around the globe, its government has focused its influence initiatives on masking its policies and suppressing, to the extent possible, any voices beyond China's borders that are critical of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). According to analysis by our institution and think tank partners, Beijing's techniques include both co-optation and manipulation, and they are targeted at the media, academia, and the policy community. The country seeks to permeate institutions in democratic states that might draw attention or raise obstacles to CCP interests, creating disincentives for any such resistance.

Although there are differences in the shape and tone of the Chinese and Russian approaches, both stem from an ideological model that privileges state power over individual liberty and is fundamentally hostile to free expression, open debate, and independent thought.

Observers should not understand Moscow's and Beijing's efforts as "soft power." They are more properly labeled "sharp power."

Authoritarian influence efforts are "sharp" in the sense that they pierce, penetrate, or perforate the political and information environments in the targeted countries. In the ruthless new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states, the repressive regimes' sharp power techniques should be seen as the tip of their dagger. These regimes are not necessarily seeking to "win hearts and minds," the common frame of reference for soft power efforts, but they are surely seeking to manipulate their target audiences by distorting the information that reaches them.

Sharp power likewise enables the authoritarians to cut into the fabric of a society, stoking and amplifying existing divisions. Russia has been especially adept at exploiting rifts within the democracies, for example promoting narratives in Central and Eastern European countries that aim to undermine support for the EU and NATO. And unlike the blunt impact of hard power, sharp power entails a degree of stealth. Taking advantage of the open political and information environment of

democracies, the authoritarians' sharp power efforts are typically difficult to detect, meaning that they benefit from a lag time before the targeted democracies realize there is a problem.

Above all, the term “sharp power” captures the malign and aggressive nature of the authoritarian projects, which bear little resemblance to the benign attraction of soft power. Through sharp power, the generally unattractive values of authoritarian systems—which encourage a monopoly on power, top-down control, censorship, and coerced or purchased loyalty—are projected outward, and those affected are not so much audiences as victims.

Decision-makers in Beijing and Moscow have the political will to build up and implement their influence efforts. By comparison, the United States and other leading democracies seem to have withdrawn from competition in the sphere of ideas. The democracies have been slow to shake off the long-standing assumption—in vogue from the end of the Cold War until the mid-2000s—that unbridled integration with repressive regimes would inevitably change them for the better, without any harmful effects on the democracies themselves. But as globalization accelerated and integration deepened over the past decade, the authoritarians survived, and their ability to penetrate the political and media space of democracies has become progressively stronger. The authoritarian initiatives themselves are truly global in scope, turning up in democratic countries on every continent.

The democracies' complacency concerning the evolution of malign, sharp power has been informed by their reliance on the soft power paradigm. The conceptual vocabulary that has been used since the Cold War's end no longer seems adequate to the contemporary situation. Until democratic states come to terms with the underlying nature of the authoritarians' influence, they will be hamstrung in their ability to marshal effective responses to this threat.

A clearer picture of these regimes' intent can be gleaned from their own domestic political and media landscapes. Beijing and Moscow have methodically suppressed genuine dissent, smeared or silenced political opponents, inundated their citizens with propagandistic content, and deftly co-opted independent voices and institutions—all while seeking to maintain a deceptive appearance of pluralism, openness, and modernity. Indeed, the dazzling variety of content

available to consumers helps disguise the reality that the paramount authorities in these countries brook no dissent. In China's case, a sophisticated system of online manipulation—which includes a vast, multilayered censorship system and “online content monitors” in government departments and private companies who number in the millions—is designed to suppress and neutralize political speech and collective action, even while encouraging many ordinary people to feel as though they can express themselves on a range of issues they care about.

It is with a similar approach that the authoritarian trendsetters have plunged into the open societies of the democratic world. For example, just as Beijing has compelled its domestic Internet companies and news outlets to police their own content, it hopes to school its international interlocutors on the boundaries of permissible expression.

Those who interpret these efforts as a way for Moscow and Beijing to boost their countries' soft power are missing the mark and risk perpetuating a false sense of security. After all, if the aim of the authoritarians' efforts is to improve their international image, then it stands to reason that their elaborate initiatives must not be working because Russia and China do not in fact enjoy an improved image in the democracies. And even if they were, there would be no obvious or direct harm to democratic states.

Unfortunately, authoritarian regimes view the use of such power in an entirely different way, one that cannot be divorced from the political values by which they govern at home. As the essays in a forthcoming report by the National Endowment for Democracy's International Forum for Democratic Studies point out, the authoritarians are not engaged in a form of public diplomacy as democracies would understand it. Instead, they appear to be pursuing more malign objectives, often associated with new forms of outwardly directed censorship and information manipulation.

The serious challenge posed by authoritarian sharp power requires a multidimensional response that includes unmasking Chinese and Russian influence efforts that rely in large part on camouflage—disguising state-directed projects as the work of commercial media or grassroots associations, for example, or using local actors as conduits for foreign propaganda and tools of foreign manipulation. It will also require that the democracies, on the one hand, inoculate

themselves against malign authoritarian influence that corrodes democratic institutions and standards and, on the other, take a far more assertive posture on behalf of their own principles.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power?cid=int-lea&pgtype=hpg>

Kim Jong Un's Quest for an ICBM By Jeffrey Lewis

The State of North Korea's Missile Program

North Korea is on track to conduct a record number of missile tests this year, with the ultimate goal of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the continental United States. During his 2017 New Year's Day speech, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un said that his country had "entered the final stage of preparation for the test launch of an ICBM." North Korean state media outlets have repeatedly asserted that despite international protests, the country has the right to conduct such a test at the time of its choosing. And during an April 15 parade in Pyongyang, the regime showed off two different kinds of vehicles, six apiece, each carrying large missile canisters apparently designed to carry ICBMs.

No one doubts that Kim Jong Un wants an ICBM; many, however, wonder whether his missileers are close to delivering one that works. North Korea today has at least four paths to a working ICBM, and although each has its drawbacks, taken together, they suggest a country that will likely succeed before too long.

WHY BUILD A MISSILE?

There are obvious reasons for North Korea to seek the capability to strike the United States with a nuclear weapon. Washington is Pyongyang's primary adversary and the one power in the world that threatens Kim Jong Un with the fate that befell Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein: forcible regime change. The North Koreans believe that Qaddafi, who was toppled by a NATO intervention in 2011, made a fatal mistake by abandoning his nuclear weapons program in 2003 and that Hussein, who was deposed in 2003, doomed himself by allowing the United States to build up its forces in neighboring countries before the Iraq war. Pyongyang wants nuclear weapons both as a deterrent against invasion and as a part of its strategy for repelling one. If war was to break out, North Korea would likely use large numbers of nuclear weapons against U.S. forces in Japan and South Korea, hoping to shock the United States and blunt an invasion.

A threat to use nuclear weapons against U.S. forces throughout South Korea and Japan would be credible only if North Korea is also capable of striking the United States—U.S. officials have suggested that Kim Jong Un would be committing suicide by using nuclear weapons in this way, but they do so safe in the knowledge that Washington and other U.S. cities are out of North Korea's reach. That is why the development of an ICBM is an essential component of Pyongyang's nuclear strategy.

THE SCUDS ARE ALRIGHT

The basis of North Korea's missile force was a pair of Soviet-manufactured Scud-B missiles provided by Egypt in the late 1970s. Pyongyang is believed to have reverse engineered the Egyptian Scuds in order to create missiles of its own. Today, short-range Scud missiles form the bulk of North Korea's arsenal and have been sold to countries around the world, including Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Vietnam, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates. North Korea has also created a series of longer-range missiles using Scud-based technology, including the Nodong medium-range ballistic missile as well as space-launch vehicles—carrier rockets used to reach outer space—that Western analysts call the Taepodong and Taepodong-2.

The Scud-B missiles that North Korea imported could carry a 2,200-pound payload just under 200 miles. Today, the country's extended-range Scuds can carry a half-ton payload more than 600 miles, while the Nodong, a larger version of the basic Scud missile, can deliver a similar-sized payload just under 750 miles. North Korea's most recent missile test, on May 29, was of a Scud-C missile with improved guidance that is more accurate than the regime's other short-range Scud missiles.

North Korea has used this basic technology to develop a launcher, which it calls the Kwangmyongsong and the United States calls the Taepodong-2. In theory, Pyongyang could use the Taepodong-2 as an ICBM, and a three-stage version might travel over 9,000 miles—capable of hitting the East Coast of the United States. But the process of assembling and fueling North Korea's space launchers is lengthy and requires the use of a massive gantry. Such a missile would be vulnerable during its long preparation to launch—an obvious drawback that limits

its strategic value. These problems have led North Korea to develop alternative missile systems. One of these is an ICBM called the KN-08.

MUSUDAN-CE THE NIGHT AWAY

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, North Korea sought more advanced technologies for its missile program—technologies that would scale better than those in the Scud missiles supplied by Egypt. During the 1990s, reports emerged that engineers from Russia's Makeyev Missile Design Bureau, which had designed the Soviet Union's submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), were helping Pyongyang to copy a Soviet-era SLBM called the SS-N-6. The United States calls the North Korean version of this missile, which appeared in the middle of the following decade, the Musudan.

The Musudan uses more powerful propellants than the Scud, which allows North Korea to build longer-range missiles that are compact enough to be carried by vehicles. But it is also a far more complicated missile. Soviet designers needed to keep the SS-N-6 short enough to fit inside a submarine launch tube, so they submerged the engine inside the fuel tank. This complex design has proved hard for North Korea to replicate. All but one of Pyongyang's six or eight attempts to launch a Musudan have failed. (It is not always easy to tell what has been launched if it explodes.)

Just as North Korea has attempted to create an ICBM using Scud-based technologies, it has also tried to make one based on the Musudan. Despite the challenges associated with this design, North Korea seems to have used a pair of the submerged engines as the basis for its KN-08, an ICBM that would be able to deliver a nuclear weapon-sized payload to Washington. No state that has developed an ICBM has been unable to develop a reentry vehicle capable of delivering a warhead.

North Korea conducted a ground test of the KN-08 engine in 2016, demonstrating that the engine works in a controlled environment. But it has yet to conduct a flight test, which is necessary to demonstrate that all the components of the missile would function properly in a realistic launch scenario. Given the Musudan's awful track record, there are many reasons to think that the first KN-08 flights will fail. Some experts, such as Markus Schiller of ST Analytics, doubt that it can ever be

made to work given the engineering challenges posed by the engine. Nevertheless, when Kim Jong Un discussed North Korea's readiness to conduct an ICBM test this year, the KN-08 was probably the missile he had in mind.

The KN-08 represents a more plausible path to an ICBM than the Taepodong-2. But both missiles emerged from a process of taking existing rocket engines designed by someone else and attempting to use them to cobble together an ICBM. On March 18, North Korea showed something new—a ground test of a new engine that the country's officials said was completely indigenous (although assistance from countries such as Iran cannot be ruled out). The government's statement called the event “a historic day which can be called the March 18 revolution.” The new engine appears to use the same propellants as the Musudan, but without the complicated submerged-engine design that has bedeviled North Korea's engineers.

The statement also warned that “the whole world will soon witness what eventful significance the great victory won today carries.” This was apparently a reference to the Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile, which North Korea tested on May 14. Based on images of the missile, my colleagues and I at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies believe the Hwasong-12 uses the new “March 18” engine and is capable of carrying a nuclear weapon about 3,000 miles—just short of the technical definition of an ICBM (3,400 miles) and capable of striking Guam and the Aleutian Islands. Although the Hwasong-12 is not an ICBM, it represents a domestic capacity to design engines that should ultimately manifest itself in far more capable missiles.

Kim Jong Un watches a ground test of the

Finally, there is North Korea's rapidly developing solid-fueled missile program. The Taepodong-2, KN-08, and Hwasong-12 all use liquid-fueled engines, which must be fueled prior to launch. Liquid-fueled rockets are typically less mobile and require a larger number of support vehicles, whereas solid-propellant rockets, although they are less powerful, arrive from the factory fully fueled and offer more mobility. Before 2015, North Korea had tested only a few, relatively small, solid-fueled ballistic missiles. But in the past two years, it has successfully tested a two-stage medium-range missile that can be launched from a submarine and, beginning this year, a variant that is launched from land. North Korea's new generation of solid-

fueled missiles represents a far more survivable missile force than its existing Scuds and Nodongs.

It is hard to say how quickly North Korea might develop a solid-propellant ICBM. The major challenge of building such missiles lies in casting motors in the large diameters necessary for them to travel long distances. The diameter of North Korea's missile is 1.5 meters—an important threshold that, although it represents progress, is well short of the larger diameters needed for an ICBM.

North Korea almost certainly has a compact fission warhead capable of fitting on a future ICBM. Pyongyang claimed that its most recent nuclear test, in September 2016, was for the purpose of standardizing a warhead small enough to arm its ballistic missile force. This was the same language North Korea used earlier in the year when Kim Jong Un posed in front of a mockup of a compact nuclear warhead next to a KN-08—the message clearly being that North Korea had tested the warhead that would arm its ICBM. With five nuclear tests under its belt, North Korea's claim is line with the progress that other nuclear powers had made at similar points in the development of their programs. For instance, China, by the time of its fifth nuclear test, had both built a nuclear weapon small enough to be delivered by a missile and developed the basic principles for the massive thermonuclear weapon it would test next.

The major question now is not whether the warhead is small enough to mount on an ICBM—it is—but whether it is rugged enough to survive the shock, vibration, and extreme temperatures that a nuclear warhead would experience on an intercontinental trajectory, in which it would be shot into space and then reenter the earth's atmosphere. A successful intercontinental launch would involve not only the durability of the warhead itself but that of the reentry vehicle—the part of the ICBM that protects the warhead from the incredible heat generated by reentering the atmosphere.

Some analysts, including within the U.S. intelligence community, have expressed doubt about whether North Korea's current reentry vehicle would survive an ICBM's journey. But no state that has developed an ICBM has been unable to develop a reentry vehicle capable of delivering a warhead. The warhead fitted to the Hwasong-12 experienced heat loads similar to those of an ICBM (although for a shorter period of time) and survived. Separately, North Korea has published

images of an apparently successful ground test of a reentry vehicle last year. Similar doubts were expressed about China's nuclear warheads in the 1960s, prompting China's leaders to arm a missile with a live nuclear weapon and launch it across the country to dispel any lingering doubts. Fortunately, North Korea has not chosen to take such a step.

WAITING ON KIM

Any and all of these programs could lead to a functioning ICBM. North Korea could test a KN-08 or a converted Taepodong-2 at any time, although a first KN-08 flight test is likely to fail. Or North Korea could wait to test a far more capable ICBM, based on either the engine displayed on March 18 or the solid-fueled missile program.

North Korea's state media has stated that the country could test an ICBM at "any time and anywhere determined by the supreme headquarters of the DPRK"—a reference to Kim Jong Un. Kim's decision, however, will be as much political as technical. Does Kim value a quick demonstration of a crude capability? Is he willing to wait for a more credible ICBM? Or will he wait, hoping to explore diplomatic options to reduce tension on the peninsula? Only time will tell.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2017-06-09/kim-jong-uns-quest-icbm?cid=int-lea&pgtype=hpg>

Exit Mugabe | Editorial

The streets of Harare were flooding with celebrations after Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe resigned on Tuesday. The optimism on display is rather strange. Mugabe has been responsible for the economic misery of a country and the repression of political freedoms there. But responsibility for that must – in all fairness – be shared at the very least by 93-year-old Mugabe's closest advisers. It is here that all the optimism must be dampened. Power has been transferred – via a military intervention – to Mugabe's former right-hand man, Emmerson Mnangagwa, himself on the wrong side of the eight decade of his life. But it is not his age that is at issue. Mnangagwa is hardly a symbol of hope. In fact, he can be seen as a symbol of some of the worst excesses of the Mugabe regime. One of Mugabe's old comrades from the liberation war that led to Zimbabwe's independence, Mnangagwa was and is a key figure within Mugabe's party, ZANU-PF. He has also served as the country's spy chief and was vice president until Mugabe's wife Grace ousted him two weeks ago in a Machiavellian manoeuvre that very evidently backfired. He escaped to South Africa while his close connections in the Zimbabwe Defence Forces orchestrated a military intervention.

The ZDF intervention – a bit too guarded to be called a direct military coup – was not about getting rid of Robert Mugabe. It is an ouster, but the aim is not to seize power for the military, but to transfer power to another member of the ruling ZANU-PF. Power is being kept within the narrow elite that has ruled Zimbabwe over the past decades. In the absence of any concrete progress on a unity government, which includes the opposition, there is little real change that can be expected. The Zimbabwe economy has been on the brink of collapse amidst sanctions since the early 2000s. The currency crisis in the country is only the tip of the iceberg. The country is trying to run on a mix of US dollars and Zimbabwe bonds, both of which barely exist in the formal market. This is not an easy problem to fix. And Mnangagwa's promise of job creation itself makes little sense without a fix to the currency question. It is a strange world now for Zimbabweans. No longer having his shadow over them is perhaps enough to give them hope. There was much to admire about Mugabe once; but there was also much more to despise. Knowing when to let go of power is an art, one that Mugabe never understood. At the end, Mugabe became a symbol for all that has become stale in Zimbabwe. The removal of that symbol might usher in more substantial change sooner than we might expect. Elections are scheduled for next year.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/248010-exit-mugabe>

Europe needs a Leader. Who will step up if Merkel Goes? By Simon Jenkins

Suddenly Brexit matters, a lot. Until recently I had regarded it as one of those crises that we muddle through somehow, like the bank collapse or the winter of discontent. Time is the great compromiser. Project fear would turn out to be project not-quite-as-bad-as-we-thought.

Hovering over Brexit was Angela Merkel, goddess of common sense. We were told that the implacable Michel Barnier in Brussels was always “waiting for the nod from Berlin”. Autocratic German bankers might screw the eurozone. But there was always Minerva Merkel, the rock, pragmatic towards Russia, tough towards Greece, welcoming to refugees, tightfisted with money.

The rock has crumbled. The allies’ postwar crafting of Germany’s constitution, to nobble it with coalitions, has turned sour. Overnight, Merkel makes Britain’s Theresa May seem positively secure. We have no idea what leadership may ensue in Berlin, and so no idea what may lie in store for the EU. There couldn’t be a worse time for Britain to upset the apple-cart.

Britons are cursed to remember too much, but sometimes they do not remember enough. Throughout history, peace in Europe has relied on equilibrium, on a balance of power between the many member states. Every great conflict in the continent’s history has resulted from an upsetting of this equilibrium – for the past 150 years by Germany.

Britain was never part of this balance. It is an island, sufficient unto itself. When, during the hundred years war, it tried to become a European power, it made a mess of it, and never tried again. Henry VIII oversaw the first Brexit in 1534, detaching Britain from the authority of Roman Catholic Europe. Tudors, Stuarts and Hanoverians carefully absented themselves from Europe’s vicious wars of religion and succession. Through the settlements of Westphalia, Utrecht and Vienna, Britain notionally supported the balance of power, but her chief interest lay in a trading empire.

Hence Robert Walpole's proud boast in 1734: "There are 50,000 men slain this year in Europe, and not one an Englishman." Lord John Russell disbanded most of the British army after Waterloo, to avoid "turning a naval into a military nation, a mighty island into a petty continental state". After the rise of Bismarck, the Tory Lord Salisbury in the 1890s preached "splendid isolation", with Britain "drifting lazily downstream, putting out a boat-hook occasionally to avoid collision".

In other words, Britain has been Brexiting since the 16th century. But sometimes the Brexit did not last. Salisbury's boat-hook soon became a mighty army. Britain's wars against Germany in the 20th century were to redress an upset in the balance of power. It was in this pan-European spirit that Britain joined Nato and later the Common Market. It accepted that geography meant a commitment to Europe's strategic and economic space – albeit rarely as a full-hearted member of the EU. It seems to have been content to leave Germany in charge.

Now Germany wobbles and it is dangerous. A month before the Brexit referendum, I attended a conference in Berlin of German politicians and commentators. They pleaded with us not to vote Brexit, for a surprising reason: "Don't leave us in charge." Germany, they said, was not yet a mature democracy. It was already too powerful. German politicians had fashioned the eurozone to benefit their banks and blight poor countries. Nationalists on the far right were resurgent everywhere.

I usually discount such short-term histrionics, but not now. Like any chancellor, Merkel has been walking on eggshells. She has been weak on the EU and on eurozone reform. She has headed an EU that has become so unpopular that no other European leader would dare ask Britain's referendum question. Now Merkel herself seems on the way out.

As a result, in the clouds beyond we can see only the surging identity politics of nationalism, whether in Spain, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic or north Italy. War was once politics by other means. Now the converse may be the case, and thank goodness. But there is such a thing as dangerous politics. The centre is not holding. Leaders are digging into their national subconscious to unearth, if not guns, then a means to populist power.

The times when Britain has been summoned to "come to the aid of Europe" have been few. But they have been preceded by British blindness towards a sudden

shift in politics on the continent. When the Catholic church, Louis XIV or Napoleon threatened the peace of Europe, Britain hesitated. It might send a Marlborough or a Wellington to fly the flag for British soldiering, but its heart was rarely in it.

The same casualness infuses the present Brussels negotiations. It may be dismaying to see the EU's Barnier treat David Davis as might a counter-reformation cardinal some pesky Lutheran princeling. Barnier clearly cares nothing for Europe, only for the Holy Brussels Church and its budget. But in response Britain seems devoid of interest. It shows no vision of an endgame, as if it did not mind about Brexit either way. This is precisely how Europe slithered to war in centuries past.

Europe is not going to war. But its internal-government relations are ever more brittle. The prospect is of another credit crunch, the crippling of the Greek economy, mass unemployment in Italy and Spain, and a critical need for a deal with Russia.

Europe needs a leader. If Merkel is not to be one, then who? Surely not the egotistical Emmanuel Macron? It would have been a golden opportunity for Britain to seize the helm, if only it had not abandoned ship.

Britain has clearly to proceed with Brexit. But it must get the item off the negotiating table as soon as possible. It should seek a quickie divorce: pay the money and marry Norway. It could then hurl itself into a revived "concert of Europe", and convince the EU's council of ministers to convene a conference on reform. There could then be a fresh start, a new treaty for a future Europe of sovereign states. That is the treaty Britain can help to write and join, starting now.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/23/europe-leader-angela-merkel-crisis-german-leader-brexit>

Washington's Afghan Experience By Dr Raza Khan

While US General John Nicholson has devised a new war strategy in Afghanistan so as to quell the insurgency of the Afghan Taliban in around two years' time, Washington has to recall its experiences in the war-ravaged country. On its part the US has committed mistakes and these stem from the Americans lack of understanding of the Afghan dynamics. This is not just an opinion but also the analysis of experienced journalist Ahmed Rashid, who is considered an authority on Afghanistan due to his long physical association with the country.

The role which the US has played in Afghanistan has been quite elusive to be unequivocally explained. The strategies which Washington had employed to achieve its objectives have raised a lot of questions and eyebrows. The very objective which the US-Nato set for occupying Afghanistan was to trounce al Qaeda in Afghanistan. In order to effectively achieve the objective, Washington thought it necessary to overcome the political-power vacuum in the country so that its territory could not be used by global terrorist organisations for attacks on the US mainland.

Noticeably, eliminating the Afghan Taliban has not been the key objective. The newly commissioned US strategy in Afghanistan also calls for weakening the Taliban on the battleground so that the group could come to the negotiating table. On a couple of occasions Americans did engage with the Taliban in direct talks through the latter front office established in Doha, Qatar. However, these negotiations for peace in Afghanistan could not make much headway due to a host of problems. In this regard Pakistan influence and the villainous role of the Afghan national security establishment led by its intelligence arm, the National Directorate of Security, prevented meaningful US-Taliban talks. While Washington has been critical of Pakistan, it has turned a blind eye on the role of the Afghan security establishment.

A huge war economy has evolved in Afghanistan and key members of the Afghan establishment have immensely benefited from it apart from the Taliban. On their part these officials do not want to see an end to the Afghan conflict and so do the Taliban. The US has been unable to deal with this huge war economy in

Afghanistan while it has been trying aimlessly to deal with its repercussions. In this situation, the US limited its options in Afghanistan and had to resort to allout attacks on the Taliban.

Another very important aspect of the US dilemma in Afghanistan has been that despite significantly curtailing the number of its troops in Afghanistan and simultaneously increasing that of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the latter could not satisfactorily take over security responsibilities. It is after the withdrawal of most of the US-Nato troops from Afghanistan by December 31, 2015 that the Taliban could register a rare victory of taking over the province of Kunduz and nearly running over Helmand, another Afghan province, afterwards. This extremely poor performance of the ANSF personnel has forced the US to have second thoughts regarding the complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. Instead the US under President Donald Trump has been considering increasing the number of its troops yet again. The curtailing and increasing the number of its troops obviously demonstrates the faulty US strategy in Afghanistan. However, a closer look would reveal that the US has also had its compulsions.

Though the ordinary Afghans may be critical of the role of the US, it is more due to the immediate difficulties they have faced and in such a situation the blame always falls on the 'other'. While analysing the situation in Afghanistan one must keep history in perspective. Before the descent of US troops on Afghanistan the country was greatly unstable though the Taliban were successful in establishing the 'peace' of graveyard in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda and global, regional and local extremist troops were taking fullest advantage of the power-political vacuum in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to carry out attacks in different areas of the world.

Regarding the US role it has been argued by certain quarters that the Afghans have come to consider the US as another imperial power intent to destroy the 'Afghan way of life' and exploit the natural resources. Whatever that is known as the Afghan way of life is profoundly a tribal social structure with its ultra-reactionary institutions. It is debatable that whether the US has been intent on putting an end to this way of life or not, but the modern state structure which the US has erected in Afghanistan naturally is an antithesis of it. Independently arguing for this the US must be appreciated rather than decried because it has been the Afghan way of life and its incompatibility with the spirit of times that has been the main cause of conflict and crisis in Afghanistan.

The social structure and the Afghan way of life have prevented Afghanistan from evolving into a forward-looking state, having strong institutions and a vibrant economy. This tribal structure has also had a huge bearing on the Afghan social psychology with supremacy very much on the minds of the ordinary Afghan thinking everything Afghan is good, while the world is out there to destroy their way of life and thinking.

In order to achieve its objectives, the US needs to learn from its mistakes and understand Afghanistan's social dynamics.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1570140/6-washingtons-afghan-experience/>

Iran and Russia, Growing Apart By Alex Vatanka

Today, the latest round of UN-brokered Syria peace talks begins in Geneva, with the goal of bringing President Bashar al-Assad and various armed opposition factions to a political settlement that could put an end to half a decade of civil war in the country.

The Geneva talks come one week after another set of Syria talks, this time in Sochi. The November 22 gathering, which included some of the conflict's key remaining players—Iran, Turkey, and Russia—was supposed to be a turning point in the issue of Syria's future. At least that had been Tehran's hope. Instead, the talks highlighted emerging fissures between Assad's two main foreign backers, Iran and Russia, and even divisions within Iran between the civilian government of President Hassan Rouhani and the leadership of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

In short, the IRGC, which over the last seven years has established a strong presence in Syria through its various militias and local proxies, is anxious to preserve its gains against pushback from Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. This stance might soon bring it into open conflict with Russia and other actors, including Rouhani, who might be more open to a multilateral political settlement to end the Syrian war. Specifically, the IRGC wishes not only to secure Iranian influence in postwar Syria, but also to transform its allied Syrian militias into an institutionalized military-political force in its own image, one which could become its local abettor similar to the role Hezbollah plays in Lebanon.

SUSPICIONS IN SOCHI

In Sochi, the Iranians, Russians, and Turks ostensibly agreed on one key point: that all parties should respect Syria's territorial integrity. Other issues were discussed, including how to continue to uphold the process of de-confliction in the zones that had been agreed upon at Astana in May. Sochi was above all a summit intended as a demonstration of the ascendancy of the Iranian-Russian-Turkish partnership on Syria.

In Tehran, though, considerable doubt continues to exist about both Russian and Turkish intentions in Syria. The Iranians are particularly mindful—and resentful—of Moscow’s latitude to work with many different partners in the region. Alone among the three countries that were at Sochi, Russia has a strong and ongoing dialogue with every other state that matters on the question of Syria’s future, from the United States to Israel to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. In turn, Tehran naturally fears that deals are being cut over its head and to its detriment. The generals from the IRGC are reminding everyone, including Assad and the Russians, of their continued power and influence.

Two days before the Sochi summit, for instance, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a four-hour meeting with Assad, who had flown to the city to consult with the Russian leader. Reports on the visit in the Iranian media indicate that Tehran had had no prior knowledge of it. But it was Putin’s decision to brief U.S. President Donald Trump about Moscow’s plans just before the Sochi summit that seems to have really irked Tehran. The Iranians read this briefing as a Russian attempt to assuage the United States, which is sternly opposed to any settlement in Syria that would institutionalize Iran’s presence there. Mollifying Washington, the Iranians rightfully worry, can only come at the expense of Tehran’s influence and interests in postwar Syria.

It is therefore no coincidence that in the days since the Sochi summit, the IRGC has started to tout its capacity to deploy, maintain, and mobilize pro-Iranian militias in Syria. This is a show of hard power, and Putin and his advisors are no doubt part of the intended audience.

In other words, with Moscow preparing to turn itself into the ultimate diplomatic kingmaker in these sunset days of the Syrian conflict, the generals from the IRGC are reminding everyone, including Assad and the Russians, of their continued power and influence. And as Iran looks to maximize its relevance in postwar Syria, the country’s hardline faction, represented by the IRGC, is banking that its years of investment in various Syrian and other Arab militias will finally pay off.

The head of the IRGC, General Mohammad Ali Jafari, has been increasingly explicit about his intentions to elevate pro-Iranian militias in Syria. On November 23, for instance, Jafari said that Assad knows he is “indebted” to the “people’s militias” and understands that they are critical to his political survival. Jafari also

ventured a guess that Assad “will, of course, institutionalize [the militias] so they will remain relevant in the face of future threats.” It goes without saying that for Jafari, it is up to the IRGC to determine the identity of such future threats, and it is a safe bet that the group’s usual targets—notably the United States and Israel—will be on that list.

The IRGC’s goal is to eventually turn the Syrian militias currently under its control into semi-state actors that will become permanent instruments of Iranian influence in Syria, akin to how Hezbollah operates in Lebanon. This strategy is perhaps not surprising, as the IRGC is itself a product of such an evolution. Back in 1979, immediately after the Iranian Revolution, the IRGC began as a small group of die-hard devotees to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Over the years, this band of Islamist militants morphed from armed servants of the revolutionary clerics to a powerful state-within-the-state that rules over a vast empire of men and money.

This rhetorical escalation by the IRGC, moreover, is not only aimed at foreign audiences. The future of the pro-Iranian militias in Syria is also part of an intra-regime debate in Tehran. Rouhani has publicly kept his distance from IRGC’s plan to institutionalize its militias, but he has not been overly critical of it either. And yet, IRGC-controlled media outlets constantly hint that the Rouhani government is soft on Western demands for Tehran to abandon or at least disarm the militias. For the IRGC, this is a non-starter.

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In response to Rouhani’s relative dovishness, the IRGC position is twofold: first, that it would be foolish to cut a deal with the West (or Russia) on the future of the Syrian militias. Why give up hard-earned clout on the ground in return for dubious promises of international cooperation on Syria’s future? The prevailing mood in Tehran, which is that Iran was shortchanged by the 2015 nuclear deal, presumably gives the IRGC argument more momentum than would have otherwise been the case.

Second, the IRGC has also been quick to remind everyone that it is better equipped than the civilian government to lead Iran’s efforts to secure a slice of

reconstruction spending in Syria. This is nothing short of a jab at Rouhani. In fact, Jafari has claimed that both Rouhani's team and Assad's have agreed that IRGC-controlled economic enterprises, which can work directly under the protection of IRGC-controlled militias, are the best candidates to manage reconstruction projects in Syria. Rouhani has not yet responded to this assertion.

FORWARD DEFENSE

Observers inside and outside of Iran will find the IRGC brass's increasingly hawkish position on militias to be a bad omen. But in Tehran, the IRGC has the upper hand when it comes to Syria policy, and it clearly believes that it possesses a blueprint for success: more Hezbollah's wherever possible.

As IRGC commanders are keen to repeat, the quickly shifting regional security environment requires that Iran constantly adapt and reinvent its military strategy. In Tehran, this is referred to as "forward defense" and is premised on the idea that Iran should battle its opponents outside its borders to prevent conflict from taking place on Iranian soil. Controlling Arab militias abroad, such as those allied to the IRGC in Syria, is part and parcel of this idea of forward defense, making it unlikely that Iran will shift its stance any time soon.

From a broader Syrian perspective, however, it is hard to see how enduring peace can return to the country if armed local groups answerable to an aggressive, ideological foreign organization such as the IRGC continue to play a critical role in the political process.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-11-29/iran-and-russia-growing-apart?cid=int-lea&pgtype=hpg>

Has Poverty Been Reduced? By Paul Buchheit

“Take a bow, capitalism.” That’s from *The Economist*, a business-happy publication that has every reason to perpetuate the myth that a world run by free enterprise is improving people’s lives. Its story continues with an astounding claim: “The world now knows how to reduce poverty.” Perhaps by presenting questionable data that seems to support what the business community wants us to believe.

Other super-capitalists are similarly exuding hyperbole in defense of their shaky beliefs. Said a spokesman for the American Enterprise Institute: “It was the American free-enterprise system that started to spread around the world. They looked at you and said, ‘I want to have their life, their freedom, and their stuff, and they threw off their chains of poverty and tyranny.’” But it’s clear, when the facts are checked, that the chains of poverty are being wrapped around more and more human beings.

According to the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook 2016, the median wealth of the world’s adults is \$2,222, down from \$3,248 at the end of 2007. While the rich people of the world have taken more than their share of the \$35 trillion wealth gain since the recession, the world median has dropped by over \$1,000!

There are other recent indications of rising poverty. Based again on Credit Suisse wealth data, in just seven years the world’s Gini Coefficient, the most widely accepted measure of inequality, has surged from 88.1 to 92.7. Wealth inequality BETWEEN countries has grown dramatically. It’s a stunning rise, further evidence of a world splitting into two.

A widely held misconception is that global inequality between countries is declining because of growth in China and other developing countries. But that claim is generally made with respect to income inequality, and it is only partially true. Global income inequality is down only in relative terms, in the sense that an income boost from \$1 to \$2 a day is greater in percentage than an income boost from \$1,000 to \$1,500 a day.

The world poverty threshold was recently increased by the World Bank from \$1.25 to \$1.90 per day. Numerous sources have recognized the absurdity of this dollar

amount for day-to-day survival. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development argues for a \$5 minimum; ActionAid says \$10; even the World Bank admits that the \$1.90 poverty line is “too miserly for middle-income countries,” and that “more than 50 percent of the population in IDA [the world’s poorest] countries live on less than US \$6 a day and are considered at high or moderate risk of relapsing into poverty.”

In addition, the poverty threshold has not kept up with inflation. The World Bank set the first poverty threshold to \$1.01/day using 1985 purchasing power parity. It eventually raised the threshold to \$1.90/day at 2011 purchasing power parity. But with inflation, \$1.01 in 1985 is equivalent to \$2.10 in 2011. The World Bank’s most recent threshold adjustment falls far short of realistic human needs.

The UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) took advantage of this in the year 2000, calling for a halving of poverty, but backtracking to the year 1990 to include the income gains across China.

Conditions getting better? Only in the minds of capitalists who don’t want their comfortable lives disrupted by a rebellion among their billions of victims.

This article has been excerpted from: ‘Extreme Poverty Cut in Half? Only in the Minds of the Capitalists’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/242746-Has-poverty-been-reduced>