

Monthly World Perspective

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China-Russia: A Strategic Partnership Short on Strategy

By Nicholas Trickett

The recent bilateral summit between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin has launched a geopolitical summit craze. On June 24, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron launched a spectacularly ill-conceived effort to secure an EU-Russia summit that immediately fell apart. The next day, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced a video conference between Putin and Xi Jinping scheduled for June 28. The question was what, exactly, they intended to talk about and whether there are any significant bilateral initiatives to announce or else be discerned in motion.

The video conference made for decent theater. The two leaders marked the upcoming 20th anniversary of the bilateral signing of their nations' 2001 Treaty of Friendship and ran through the traditional laundry list of thematic priorities: the extension of said treaty, reaffirmation of the value of the strategic partnership, boilerplate statements about the Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's Greater Eurasia Partnership, and the same about the Northern Sea Route. Nowhere, however, was there any public statement of a significant new policy development regarding a wide range of areas of mutual interest.

Even more telling was Putin's need to sidestep the obvious fact that the two leaders couldn't meet in person because of the Russian state's resounding failure in COVID-19 management and vaccine distribution. None of the agenda items that matter now was put in front of the cameras. The Russian readout of the event did, however, note concerns about the destabilizing effects of U.S. withdrawals from international arms control agreements.

Elephants in the Room

The U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan is an area of joint interest for Moscow and Beijing. Both governments were comfortable with a status quo that locked in large U.S. spending commitments, the deployment of U.S. airpower, and a sizeable U.S. detachment capable of regularly deploying outside of Kabul and key airbases to

support the ANSF against the Taliban. Biden wrongfooted Moscow by announcing the withdrawal, though the term should be tempered by the fact that there are now plans to leave 650 troops in Kabul, an understanding that the United States will continue to financially support President Ashraf Ghani's government, and over-the-horizon air capabilities will be stationed at Al-Udeid in Qatar to support military action in the country. Still, the Taliban have gained considerable ground in the last two months and Afghan government troops are now regularly attempting to flee across the Uzbek and Tajik in search of safety.

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The lack of a joint statement on Afghanistan at the recent Putin-Xi summit likely reflects the two governments' high degree of ambivalence concerning the conflict. Russia has stepped up its military contacts with both the Uzbek and Tajik governments and deployed more troops to Tajikistan. While China has expanded its security partnerships and presence on the border, it hasn't communicated any change in policy. At the same time, Russia has visibly receded as an "ordering" power when it comes to regional initiatives. In the wake of a border fight between Kyrgyz and Tajik forces over undemarcated territory in the Osh region, China hosted the foreign ministers of all six Central Asian states to discuss Afghanistan and regional economic development without any attempt to include Russia. Moscow never even set up a trilateral meeting or similar initiative between national leaders.

Far less concerning for Beijing – and more concerning for Moscow – is Belarus' economic future. The weight of United States and EU sanctions aren't enough to sink the economy by any stretch, but the loss of access to EU capital markets and targeted sanctions on its refineries have pushed Russian firms to cut oil supplies and Minsk to rely on Russian banks and Russia's financial markets to borrow more. Why should Beijing care? Belarus is an entry point for rail shipments transiting Russia into Europe, though Ukrainian importers are beginning to use Russian routes from China as well. Belarus is by no means a priority for China in Eastern Europe, but it at least has a role in the web of interconnectivity China has pushed as an economic panacea for Eurasia's growth over the last eight years. Yet based on the Putin-Xi meet-up, clearly Belarus doesn't merit any significant public statement.

On the biggest global issue of the day – public health responses to COVID-19 – China and Russia could scarcely be more divergent. Russia’s vaccination campaign has been a tremendous flop. Only about 15-16 percent of the population has had at least one dose since mass vaccinations started in January and the current wave, worsened by the Delta variant, is overwhelming hospitals and bringing the relative increase in mortality levels back to highs not seen since 1947. Even the Kremlin has openly acknowledged that its own 60 percent vaccination target for the fall can’t be achieved at this point.

China, on the other hand, has been effective at quickly locking down when needed in response to local outbreaks and, despite misgivings about the efficacy of its vaccines, has fully vaccinated over 220 million people with vaccinations significantly rising since early April and the rollout proceeding smoothly thus far. Both China and Russia managed to “beat” the pandemic’s effect on their economies through their exports. U.S. stimulus and European safety nets allowed Western consumers to shift their spending on services to hard goods at the same time that a new commodity price cycle began, raising the value of Russia’s non-oil and gas resource exports. But China’s consumer recovery has been a fair bit weaker than its export recovery, with signs now of a slowdown as credit conditions have been tightened to fight off speculation and help manage the surge of capital into the country since the pandemic began. Russia’s consumer recovery is evaporating under the weight of high inflation, limited state support to households, and the new wave of the virus. Despite Moscow’s assumption that the sheer size of the Chinese economy would be enough to offset the persistent weakness of economies in the EU since the Global Financial Crisis, that won’t clearly be the case in the year ahead.

The Biden Boom and Europe’s Green Dreams

These summits aren’t just a function of bilateral or multilateral agendas between nations. They’re backgrounded by the ebb and flow of global markets, regulations, and money. The size of American stimulus has made the United States, not China, the driver of global growth at the moment, and an ongoing EU initiative to apply tariffs on carbon-intensive imports has forced Putin to order up a national decarbonization strategy for this October. The size of markets matter, but the marginal growth of markets matters just as much when assessing different nations’

ability to affect norms, rules, and business practices. In practical terms, there's a renewed sense of momentum in the West, if unevenly distributed, that's beginning to weigh on Russia's internal political economy. China is a natural partner for Russia in the race to decarbonize. It makes a majority of the world's solar panels, refines half the world's cobalt, has lots of industrial know-how and experience establishing competitive manufacturing supply chains for renewable inputs, and would benefit from playing a proactive role in oil exporters' decarbonization plans. Yet there was no attempt to even signal coordination or interest in future cooperation during the conversation on Monday. China's national emissions trading scheme failed to launch by the initial end of June target set by the government and the issue has only just come onto the policy agenda in Moscow, with word that Anatoly Chubais might be given responsibility for managing Russia's national carbon trading system. The Sino-Russian relationship, nothing like an "alliance," will continue to endure and in some ways deepen. Chinese firms are still interested in Russia's human capital and natural resources and Russian firms and investors want to find growth in China's market. The Putin-Xi meeting, however, emphasized performance over substance, limited by domestic political considerations and the scope of the two countries' mutual interests. There's a sense that there is no clear consensus over what order in Central Asia and Eurasia more broadly ought to look like, nor any attempt to show that it's not just the world's democracies talking a mean game about coordinating climate efforts. Instead, China and Russia continue their repeated focus on presenting a united front against the dominance of American and transatlantic power – without reflecting on what that power is actually doing right now.

29 Jun 2021

India, China and the Quad's defining test

Arzan Tarapore

The Quad is stronger than ever. The informal ‘minilateral’ grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the United States has in the past year held its first stand-alone ministerial meeting and its first leaders’ summit, and launched an ambitious project to deliver Covid-19 vaccines. This ‘golden age’ of the Quad is a product of newfound Indian enthusiasm for the grouping, in turn spurred by the military crisis in Ladakh, where India faces ongoing Chinese troop incursions across the two countries’ disputed border.

But the Quad is not bulletproof. Some experts have suggested that the economic and diplomatic effects of the devastating second wave of the pandemic in India will preoccupy the Indian government, sapping the Quad of capacity for any new initiatives. Others counter that India remains committed to competition with China—which is what really matters for the Quad—although its partners always expected ‘two steps forward, one step back’ from India.

The pandemic may well prove to be a hiccup in the Quad’s evolution; but a potentially much larger disruption may come from the ongoing Ladakh crisis itself. As I argue in a new ASPI Strategic Insights paper, the crisis has greatly increased the risk of a border war between India and China, which would present a defining test of the Quad. A possible war could either strengthen or enervate the Quad—depending on how India and its partners, including Australia, act now to shape the strategic environment. Risk is a function of likelihood and consequence. The likelihood of war on the India–China border is still low—both countries would prefer to avoid it—but has risen since the crisis began. Both countries have greatly expanded their military deployments on the border, and backed them with new

permanent infrastructure to resupply and reinforce them. China has proved its revisionist intent with large and costly military incursions, although its specific objectives and plans remain unknown. And the interaction of both countries' military strategies and doctrines would, on the threshold of conflict, promote escalation.

The consequences of a possible conflict would be dire for both belligerents and for the region. China —assuming it is the provocateur of conflict—would likely face some political rebuke from states that consider themselves its competitors, but it will work strenuously to reduce those costs, and would likely have priced them in to its calculations of whether to fight. India will suffer high tactical costs on the border, and may also suffer wider harm, if China uses coercive cyberattacks against strategic or dual-use targets. In a costly war, the repercussions may spill over to damage India's recently developing strategic partnerships, especially with the United States and Australia. Despite generally favourable views of the US, the Indian strategic elite still harbours some latent suspicions. This was highlighted in two episodes in April 2021, when the US Navy conducted a freedom of navigation patrol through the Indian exclusive economic zone, and when the US was slow in delivering Covid-19 vaccine raw materials and other relief. Both instances quickly receded from the Indian public imagination—thanks to quick correctives from Washington—but they did reveal that, under some conditions, Indian perceptions of its new partnerships can be quickly coloured by distrust.

A China–India border war may create exactly those conditions. There is a chance that conflict may result in a redoubled Indian commitment to the Quad, if New Delhi judges that it has no option but to seek more external assistance. Conversely, unless a conflict is managed well by India and its partners, it is more likely to result in Indian disaffection with the Quad. India deepened Quad cooperation during the Ladakh crisis partly as a deterrent signal to China, and partly because the Quad is still full of promise. However, after a conflict—when China hasn't been deterred and has probably imposed significant costs on India—the Quad's utility would have been tested, and probably not ameliorated India's wartime disadvantage. The task before Quad governments is to be sensitised to this risk and implement mitigation strategies before a possible conflict, to buttress the coalition in advance. As I outline in the ASPI paper, they could do this at three levels. First, they could offer operational support—such as intelligence or resupply of key

equipment, as the US already has done in the Ladakh crisis—although Quad partners’ role here would be limited. Second, they could provide support in other theatres or domains—with a naval show of force, for example, although cyber operations would probably be more meaningful in deterring conflict or dampening its costs. Third, they could provide political and diplomatic support—signalling to Beijing that a conflict would harm its regional political standing.

For Quad members, the main goal would be to deter conflict in the first place, and, failing that, to preserve the long-term strategic partnership with India for the sake of maintaining as powerful and energetic a coalition as possible to counterbalance China in the long term.

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THE EXPRESS

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Pakistan's flawed Indian policy

Imran Jan

Let me clarify at the outset that war never solves anything, least of all a tense relationship between two nations. Simultaneously, the other extreme side of war; passivity and friendly gestures, are not the answer either. The wrong approach Pakistan adopts when it comes to India is to downgrade the success of Indian ulterior motives and sanitise the looming Indian threat.

India keeps grabbing land in Kashmir so that the land is literally cultivated for harvesting what would someday yield an Indian identity of the place. Pakistan's response to that could be summed up as denialism. It keeps making noise about Indian defeat in Kashmir. What is worse is that it creates a passivity inside the minds of the Pakistani citizenry, that India is already on its way out of Kashmir because they have lost it there. Nothing could be further from the practical ground realities though. India may very well be right on the path toward never reversing the annexation of August 5, 2019. The people of Kashmir hate the Indians but the world is never guided by democratic principles. Brute force and aggression always win. The underestimation of the Indian threat that is created inside Pakistan's psyche because of the incessant noise made in support of the case for an Indian failure in Kashmir is not going to serve Pakistan's interests. Foreign threats must not be communicated to the citizenry keeping the very citizenry in mind. Bad news must be conveyed immediately. If our leadership wants to act as a good friend of its citizenry then it should tell the harsh truth even if the public doesn't want to hear it. The most potent knowledge in winning against an enemy is knowing its strength. Singing songs about why India must leave Kashmir is not going to cut it.

Keeping the same domestic audience in mind, Pakistan's foreign minister argues in foreign media in a manner that would shame the most well-respected comedians. Opinions can be democratic, facts cannot. Facts must be told regardless of public opinion. Pakistan can learn from the American mistake when it comes to the makeup of foreign threats.

The American government acts on the other side of that extreme. They maximise the foreign threat and scare their citizenry from small and at times nonexistent threats, which achieves the American citizenry's support of the savagery that follows as aggression in the name of some nice-sounding cause such as Responsibility to Protect, defending human rights and so forth. Pakistan indirectly asks its citizens to brush the threat under the carpet to justify their policies and diplomacy, while the Americans ask their citizens to imagine the threats out there to justify the ensuing aggression.

Both are wrong because they don't tell the truth about the nature and extent of the foreign threat. The result is that Americans are cognizant of the imagined threat while Pakistanis are incognizant of the real threat. I am not making a case for Pakistan to adopt the American model of looking for enemies and making case after case for aggression, but rather that the extreme passivity is wrong. That is perhaps one contributing factor in the success of the fifth-generation warfare waged inside Pakistan. The fifth-generation warriors are winning partly because there is less noise about India being an enemy and more noise about sending friendly gestures toward that enemy. And don't even start me on what case Pakistan is making against India globally.

A few tweets by Imran Khan and some comic interviews by the FM could be summed up as Pakistan's foreign diplomacy regarding Indian atrocities. One could put one's money where one's mouth is but first the mouth has to make the required noise. Seeing no evil doesn't diminish the evil.

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What Airstrikes in Iraq and Syria Say About U.S.-Middle East Policy

Daniel R. DePetris , fellow, Defense Priorities

By now, you've heard about the Biden administration's most recent U.S. military operation in Iraq and Syria. Responding to an alarming series of sophisticated drone attacks from Iran-sponsored Shiite militias in Iraq, President Joe Biden authorized limited precision airstrikes against three separate militia facilities spanning both countries in what the Defense Department hopes will send a "clear and unambiguous deterrent message." Those militias, unfortunately, didn't get the message—hours after the U.S. strikes, U.S. forces in eastern Syria were targeted with rockets. Thankfully, U.S. troops in the area were able to escape casualties.

If you believe the Biden administration, the events of the last two days are under control. The military strike was both legal and appropriate, the president and his aides insist. Sooner or later, the tit-for-tat exchange will end, and deterrence will be restored.

Case closed, right? If only it were that simple.

Let's focus on the legal aspects first. The White House would have us believe that as commander-in-chief, the president has the constitutional authority to use force at its discretion—protecting U.S. troops overseas being one of the chief carveouts. True, there are certain extraordinary circumstances when presidents have the right to use military force without congressional approval. U.S. forces under immediate hostile fire is one of them. The War Powers Resolution is quite clear on this point. U.S. troops deployed anywhere in the world always have the right to protect themselves, which is why nobody was particularly concerned when the U.S. military responded to the militia rocket attacks in Syria with counter-battery fire.

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There is a legitimate question, however, as to whether the U.S. strikes against Shiite militia targets in Iraq and Syria last Sunday can be considered acts of self-defense. The Biden administration clearly thinks so, which is why the president's Article II authority under the U.S. Constitution was invoked shortly thereafter. But was this strike really about self-defense? It's equally plausible that the U.S. airstrikes on June 27 were about deterring future rocket and drone attacks on U.S. military positions in Iraq, activities that are not expressly covered under the War Powers Resolution or indeed under Article II. Some of the administration's allies on Capitol Hill seem to take issue with Biden's interpretation of his own war powers, for good reason—in the post-Cold War era, multiple administrations have chipped away at Congress' domain in this vital area. Article II has undergone a kind of metamorphosis, in which the executive branch now deploys it as a kind of get-out-of-jail-free card to the normal constitutional process of coming to Congress for authority. The latest U.S. airstrikes reconfirm what we all know to be true: Presidents have a far more expansive definition of their own power than what the U.S. Constitution tolerates.

The Pentagon claims that the strikes on Shiite militia facilities will instill a sense of deterrence over those who seek to harass U.S. troops in Iraq with rocket fire. Unfortunately, claiming deterrence and actually re-establishing it are two entirely different things. The Biden administration can use the word "deterrence" in press releases all it wants. But unless Shiite militias like Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada start believing that the risks of targeting Americans are higher than the benefits, deterrence is nothing but an empty buzzword. Just like the U.S. airstrikes last February on the same militias didn't stop the rockets from flying in the months since, it's highly unlikely this latest round of airstrikes will either. Rather than deterrence, U.S. forces are more likely to face an escalatory spiral, where multiple rounds of fire are exchanged and opportunities for deescalation become more precarious.

Above all, Biden's latest military action exposes the hot mess otherwise known as Washington's Middle East policy. The U.S. foreign policy establishment likes to think they have a clear, concise, intelligent framework through which the U.S. achieves its objectives in the region. In reality, though, U.S. military deployments in the Middle East are dictated by inertia, habit and stale thinking rather than a clear understanding of U.S. interests.

There are approximately 50,000 U.S. troops stationed across a constellation of military bases in the Persian Gulf, a decrease from the 80,000 servicemembers deployed in the Middle East during the latter end of the Trump administration but still far more than what is required to safeguard the two principal U.S. interests in the region: defending against anti-U.S. terrorism and preventing significant, long-term disruptions to the flow of oil. The U.S. force posture in the Middle East is still very much trapped in the thralls of the Carter Doctrine—a Cold War-era policy designed to prevent a peer competitor like the Soviet Union from gaining control of the Persian Gulf (and its oil resources). Needless to say, the Soviet Union has been six-feet under for 30 years and no near-peer rival—not China and certainly not Russia—has the power, prosperity, or frankly interest in being the region's hegemon. It's about time Washington catch up to the present reality and discard the Carter Doctrine into the history books alongside the Soviets. Today, U.S. forces in Iraq are in the absurd situation of ducking and weaving from rockets set off by militias that are technically part of the official Iraqi army—the very army U.S. troops are tasked with training and advising. If this isn't strategic myopia, I don't know what is.

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STRAFASIA

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT FOR ASIA

2nd July 2021

Can Pakistan Survive Identity Politics?

Shabbir Ahmed

The world has gone through a series of issues that it has attempted to address prior to establishing institutional structures and procedures. The central question until the last decade of the twentieth century was that of the economy, which gave rise to capitalist and planned economies. This distinction of the economic systems then aligned states along with the type of economies they would adopt. The question of the economy however has not lost its context, but events in the 21st century have posed a new question which is the wandering who that lets nations all over the world as to who they really are. This is related to the politics of identity. Although identity politics has always been part of politics, it has now become one of the most powerful forces in contemporary international politics. Identity politics describes the way people adopt political and legal positions that might be based on ethnicity, race, gender, religion, social background, class, or any other identifying factor, but in third-world countries, identity politics is mainly underpinned by religion or nationalism. Though the phenomenon started on the left in the 1970s, it has now been potentially driven by the right, which can be witnessed in the western world where countries for the last decade had been moving towards protectionism to protect their identity especially, in the case of Donald Trump who used to say that I am a global citizen, but of course, America comes first and the issue of Brexit where Britain opted for independent trade policies. If the Western nations protected the liberal norms and values as the main components of their identity, it would be easy for them to unite themselves based on a broad identity. Therefore, Identity politics may be viewed as a gift for the West till or without the increasingly popular slogans of gender, race, or religion substituting liberal standards . This politics of identity has not been confined to Western democracies, but now takes a distinct approach in third world nations.

In a country like Pakistan, identity politics is problematic in the sense that the state is lacking a collective identity. One can hardly see any state in this world, which is not multiethnic. So, Pakistan is no exception. Although Pakistani ruling elites have always associated themselves with an Islamic identity that comes from the independence of Pakistan based on the so-called Two-Nation Theory. However, the state has always witnessed on the one hand a clash of faith vs secularism where the state on several occasions has used the Islamic identity whereas, the secularist forces that were part of the power structure and were in good relations with the Western powers were not only reluctant about the Islamic identity but had clearly maintained that Pakistan is a democratic country, and that Political Islam has no position in the state affairs. This concept of an Islamic identity further deteriorated when the state got in trouble with its ethnic groups such as the Baloch people and the Bengali nationalists. On the other hand, especially in the current situation, the state has been witnessing clash of faith vs ethnicity. It is primarily because people have abandoned their state's Islamic identity in favor of ethnic identification. Conflict based on ethnicity in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon to be looked upon but has existed in Pakistan in the very beginning phases of independence in Baluchistan in 1947 continued up till this day and then in the case of East Pakistan separation in 1971. This somehow proved that ethnic groups are not safe in the type of constitutional and power structure or at least the deliberate actions, Pakistan is having.

As soon as the current Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan took office in 2018, manipulated the argument and talked about a state where affairs would be conducted according to Islam. A trend of using religion got talent in framing situations and in identifying its enemies, especially India. Pakistanis have thus connected to an Islamic identity again. However, as nationalist movements such as the Pashtun protection movement in the tribal areas and parts of Baluchistan grew as a result of extrajudicial killings, state agencies forced their disappearances and similarly in case of protests by the religious groups against the blasphemous acts where the state was unable to support religious groups, hopes of Islamic identity were killed. The wave of protests made by ethnic groups particularly by the Pashtuns against the state for misuse of power is a problem that cannot be ignored. The groups involved in such protests not only criticize state policies but continuously identify themselves as Afghans, despite holding the citizenship of

Pakistan. This has been witnessed in various demonstrations made by the Pashtun Protection Movement. More recently, a few days ago Usman Kakar, a member of a Nationalist party and a senator of Pakistan, who was murdered in his home gave the nationalist groups another threat and opportunity at the same time to unite, but this time Baloch people too joined hands with the Pashtun people wholeheartedly. The state was blamed for the killing of Usman Kakar. Again, the crowds raised slogans that showed their criticism of the state, and more surprises during the funeral the flag of Afghanistan was raised on the grave of the senator.

The implication is that Pakistan is a multilingual state that lacks an identity in an age of identity politics capable of uniting Pakistanis in the same way that the West has done under liberal standards. If Pakistan has to survive the identity politics, it must work upon an identity that is not so religious as people are divided along sectarian lines and the state cannot decide upon a single school of thought, not affiliated with a certain ethnic group in majority, not so secular because that would burden the religious groups but should be an identity that is inclusive and should provide equal representation for all religious, ethnic, and political groups. It may be achieved by convincing all groups to make compromises on some aspects of their identity. Otherwise, the state may witness and ultimately divide some extremely unpleasant phases of sectarian and ethnic conflicts.

June 30, 2021

India, Turkey, and the Project of National Erosion

Written by Sunaina Danziger

The strongman at the helm of the now partial democracy is elected to office as an outsider. He claims he will help his country mend ties with the West, liberalize, fight the corruption that has befallen the dynastic, elite party that once stewarded its national founding. He promises to amplify the voice of the mosque-and-temple goer who aspires to pray every day, though his track record includes communal violence and religious nationalism. Elected to subsequent terms, he molds truth to fit his project of national greatness, a project of personal vanity. While the country's citizens contract viruses and lose their jobs, shrines to this new nationalism in major cities guarantee the project's permanence: the erosion of democracy.

This is a familiar story to India and Turkey watchers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have followed eerily similar trajectories in charge of India and Turkey and their respective right-wing populist parties. Erdoğan, who was elected in 2002 and heads the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), came into power as an anti-elitist liberalizer focused on development, market-based economics, European Union accession, and grassroots advocacy in Turkey's more conservative rural areas. Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the 2014 general elections on a platform of development, growth, and anti-corruption. Now, nearly two decades later (for Turkey) and seven years later (for India), both leaders have fashioned themselves figureheads of a new nationalism that distracts from policy failure and consolidates power in the executive.

As the world has witnessed a surge in right-wing, populist nationalism, India and Turkey provide parallel windows into schemes that merge the leader, the ethnic/religious majority, and the state. Vanity projects in urban centers—mosque construction and historical revisionism in Turkey, temple building and Central

Vista renovations in India—project the power of the head of state, while the party and its supporters blame minorities and external forces for economic woes. New landmarks historicize this cult of personality, rewriting national narratives and abrading democracy as civilians barter for oxygen cylinders and mourn their dead.

Charting Historical Trajectories

Comparing India's and Turkey's political histories underlines the outsized importance of the individual leader in shaping national ideologies. Erdogan and Modi are the latest iterations and have rallied historically neglected populations around new nationalisms. India's and Turkey's early national histories share notable motifs: lionized national founders who became first prime ministers, at the helm of independence and later catch-all ruling parties; national ideologies centered on secularism and pluralism and carried forth by an urban, educated cultural elite; a later erosion of principles and authoritarian slide within founding parties. There are also key differences: Turkey emerged as a benevolent dictatorship with a conscious path to modernization through social engineering; India gained independence as an expansive and heterogenous democracy.

As the world has witnessed a surge in right-wing, populist nationalism, India and Turkey provide parallel windows into schemes that merge the leader, the ethnic/religious majority, and the state.

Turkey's national father Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) set into motion a series of top-down, radical reforms aimed at developing a modern and secular state. As part of this process, Kemal and his government disposed of all remnants of the governing caliphate, including the Sufi orders that pervaded the earlier Ottoman Empire.¹ In 1945, the advent of multi-party democracy made the Republican People's Party (CHP) the standard bearer of "Kemalism." While scholars have argued that Kemal's reforms were intended to be iterative—a multi-step strategy for building a modern and ultimately democratic state—the later Kemalists took his principles and transformed them into a "assertively secular" national ideology. Under this ideology and early CHP rule, the state carried out "modernization" by actively excluding religion from the public sphere and adopting authoritarian anti-dissent and anti-organization laws.² Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned India as a secular, inclusive state and, through the Indian National

Congress (INC), led the struggle for Indian independence from Great Britain. The INC became the Congress Party, which, with Nehru as its leader, marshalled the construction of the modern Indian nation. The new Indian state purposefully incorporated the many religious and ethnic identities present within India while leaving religion outside the public sphere.³ Congress ideology strayed increasingly from its Nehruvian origins when Indira Gandhi rigidly centralized power and shaped Congress into a cult of personality. Between 1975 and 1977, she suspended democracy by declaring a state of emergency. After Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister and Congress grew increasingly synonymous with corruption and dynasty politics. The earliest iterations of the current AKP and BJP tried but failed in challenging these mainstream ideologies. Parties combined conservative, religious nationalism with populism, engaging rural voters in the political process. This includes the Turkish Democrat Party (DP), which formed a government during the 1950s, and the Jan Sangh, which emerged concurrently on the Indian political scene. In both instances, an excessive focus on political Islam and Hindu nationalism hampered the parties' national successes.

Both countries' current governments came to power by distancing themselves from their parties' ideological origins. The AKP, in 2002, and BJP, in 2014, successfully campaigned on pro-market and pro-democracy platforms while engaging with their conservative, religious roots to inspire rural populations. This strategy granted the parties a wide base of support. Elected to subsequent terms, first Erdogan and now Modi have energized the forgotten masses around once-fringe ideologies: authoritarian political Islam and Hindu nationalism.

“Partly Free Electoral Autocracies”

India appears to be following Turkey's lead as both political leaders have mobilized their democratically built popular support to anti-democratic ends. While Erdogan benefited early on from development and liberalization success, high growth rates and genuine democratization—including supporting the right to public religious expression—he now invests almost exclusively in sustaining power through top-down Islamization. Over the past fifteen years, Erdogan and the AKP have dismantled the checks and balances previously in place to protect Turkey's founding secularism. In 2007, after Erdogan overturned the headscarf ban

and nominated a staunch Islamist for the presidency (a ceremonial role at the time), the military threatened to “make their stance abundantly clear as the absolute defenders of secularism.” When Erdoğan and his party stood against this anti-democratic “e-coup” and only garnered further support, they were emboldened to pursue overt Islamization and crack down on civil society. Barred from standing for another term as Prime Minister, Erdogan won his country’s first direct presidential election in 2014. And after trouncing an attempted coup in 2016, President Erdoğan jailed journalists, lawyers, academics and political opponents, packing Turkish courts with young, government-sympathetic judges. As of 2021, Erdoğan has molded the presidency into one-man executive rule sustained through cronyism. Two years into his second term, Modi has set India on course to match Turkey’s authoritarianism. Elected in 2014 promising railroads and powerlines, Modi has instead overseen a period of stagnant growth, centralized power and used Hindu majoritarian politics to sell a narrative of “success” to his political base. In March 2021, the pro-democracy non-profit Freedom House demoted India from “free” to “partly free” on account of undermined institutions, suppressed political dissent and civil liberties, and a hamstrung media. The pandemic deepened this trend, as India’s most popular news outlets have refrained from broadcasting the devastation of the second wave and acknowledging the government’s missteps. Police reporting to Modi’s second-in-command, Home Minister Amit Shah, filed criminal charges, including sedition, against eight journalists who covered farmers’ protests of government agricultural reform laws. Amidst all, the Indian Supreme Court has seemed to capitulate to Modi and his majoritarian political agenda.

National and Personal Vanity

Both strongmen have married this creeping authoritarianism to right-wing nationalist ideologies, casting themselves as messiahs leading their respective nation’s return to its “authentic” cultural origins. It is this ideological project that solidifies popular support through propaganda and rewrites narratives of national founding. Modi and Erdoğan have taken physical space and national landmarks and remodeled them to map onto their ideological imaginings. Parallel stories took form in Erdoğan’s multi-year effort to revert the Hagia Sophia—Byzantine church turned Ottoman mosque turned museum—to a mosque and Modi’s construction of a Hindu temple at Ayodhya. The temple has been a rallying cry for the Hindu right since Hindu nationalist paramilitary groups demolished the Mughal-era Babri

Masjid on the grounds it was built on the birthplace of Ram. The Hagia Sophia reopened as a mosque in July 2020 and Modi lay the foundation stone for the Ayodhya temple in August 2020, while COVID-19 cases rose in both nations.

Modi and Erdoğan have taken physical space and national landmarks and remodeled them to map onto their ideological imaginings.

Both governments have used urban redevelopment—in capital New Delhi and largest city Istanbul respectively—to enshrine power in the executive at the head of new nations. Erdoğan has over the past decade attempted to Islamize Istanbul. An inflection point in this process came in 2013, after hundreds of thousands of protestors gathered in Istanbul’s Taksim Square to protest the planned demolition of Gezi Park and the construction of a military barracks and shopping mall. Forced eviction of protestors and excessive police force sparked mass demonstrations against government repression. The space for activism and large public gatherings has since massively shrunk in Turkey. In May 2021, on the eight-year anniversary of these protests and symbolizing his country’s slide, Erdoğan fulfilled his decades-long effort to construct a mosque in Taksim Square, placing a house of worship and symbol of an Islamized Turkey at the heart of new Istanbul.

In India, Modi has directed a mammoth project to reshape New Delhi’s Central Vista, recasting the relationship between citizen and government. The redevelopment includes building a new Prime Ministerial residence, razing the Nehru-era National Museum, relocating the National Archives and Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, and bulldozing the “Rajpath” boulevard that connects India Gate to Rashtrapati Bhavan. The project usurps the center of Edwin Lutyens’ Delhi, a gathering ground for civilians and street vendors. In creating a void at the center of national history for the government to fill—during the pandemic and without public consultation—the redevelopment incarnates Modi’s efforts to turn India into a Hindu nation. It disperses the buildings that house India’s cultural heritage and remodels government buildings into imposing structures, with government an entity to be worshiped. In both instances, urban redevelopment is ultimately a project of personal vanity that places the strongman leader at its center. Internal enemies—religious and ethnic minorities, the liberal, educated elite—stand small against these shrines to government power.

Conclusion

India and Turkey are tales of how charismatic leaders can exploit loopholes in ostensibly secular, democratic societies to cement personal power and set states on authoritarian paths. Historical leaders are to blame for burrowing loopholes in founding ideologies. Indira Gandhi defended India's pluralism while threatening its democracy; the later-Kemalists and military stood for secularism while overthrowing democratically elected governments. Modi and Erdoğan built popular support and succeeded early on through entirely democratic channels. The AKP, by the early 2010s, rejected many of the policies that had gained it widespread support. The BJP is now working to dismantle the forces that helped bring its religious nationalism into the mainstream. Vanity projects melding the leader, his ideology, and the nation inhibit future opportunities for dissent and more inclusive nationalisms. As the United States and Europe grapple with their own nativist impulses, and magnetic personalities seek to redefine national values, time-weathered institutions and electoral practices may forestall democratic backsliding. For now.



July 1, 2021,

Why Did Modi Meet With Kashmiri Leaders?

By Michael Kugelman,

India's prime minister is conciliatory to rivals while saving his firepower for domestic challenges—and China. Nearly two years ago, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi revoked Article 370, the constitutional clause that gave the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir its special autonomous status. A massive government crackdown followed, including internet shutdowns and the arrests of civil society members, business leaders, and senior political figures.

Modi has since shown little interest in softening his stance on the disputed region. This makes his decision to host a meeting with 14 senior Kashmiri political leaders last week striking. Yet although the move represents an about-face, it may also reflect a shift in broader Indian policy that entails extending olive branches to rivals around the region.

According to Indian press accounts, Modi focused in the meeting on the need to redraw electoral boundaries in Kashmir in anticipation of future elections. Some observers say Modi's outreach was motivated by a desire to bolster the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral prospects there. But it could also be intended to lower tensions, giving India more bandwidth to address pressing domestic matters and a border challenge with China.

India is still recovering from a devastating second COVID-19 wave, and experts fear a third wave could arrive this fall. India's economy also needs attention: It experienced its worst performance in four decades during the last fiscal year. And

more than a year after a deadly border clash with China in disputed Ladakh, India still faces an ongoing threat along its northern border, where it has deployed 50,000 additional troops. Bipin Rawat, India's chief of defense staff, recently suggested that China is a bigger threat than Pakistan.

In fact, hints of Modi's conciliatory strategy toward regional rivals first appeared in February, when India agreed to a new border cease-fire with Pakistan. Tensions with Islamabad had been serious since February 2019, when the two countries nearly went to war, and worsened after the Article 370 revocation. In 2020, their disputed border saw its largest number of cease-fire violations in two decades.

Then, several weeks ago, local media reported that India sought to open a channel of communication with the Afghan Taliban. A diplomat from Qatar, where the Taliban's political office is based, confirmed these reports this week. India likely recognizes that after U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan, the Taliban will grow stronger—either through a political settlement or through continued battlefield operations.

India has a deep development footprint in Afghanistan, and its Taliban outreach likely intends to put it in a better position to urge the insurgents not to target Indian interests and nationals. If successful, establishing contact with the Taliban could bolster India's ability to ease its security concerns in Afghanistan and again enable it to focus on domestic matters and the China challenge.

This type of outreach to rivals is delicate and difficult. In the case of Kashmir, Modi's parlay with local leaders will do little to stabilize the region. (Several days after the meeting, a drone hit an Indian air base there.) Most Kashmiris, including leaders at the meeting, bitterly reject the Article 370 revocation. Many of the region's 8 million residents view India as an occupying force, and they won't be appeased by a potential election. Kashmiris also fear that new policies ushered in by the Article 370 revocation, such as fewer restrictions on investment and land acquisitions in Kashmir, could eventually change the demographics of India's only Muslim-majority region. New Delhi has so far given no indication it will review these policies.

Additionally, Modi's government was selective with the invitation list for the meeting, inviting more New Delhi-friendly leaders and excluding a pro-separatist

political front called the All Parties Hurriyat Conference. India has refused to include the Hurriyat Conference in any Kashmir-related dialogue.

But given Modi's previous tough stance on the region, his softer approach is still significant. Moving forward, the question is how long the prime minister will sustain it. Many analysts say his tough line toward enemies has earned him more political strength—and a landslide reelection victory in 2019. But Modi lost some of his much-vaunted popularity after his botched response to India's second wave of COVID-19. His olive branches may wilt fast.

The Week Ahead

July 8: Carnegie India hosts a discussion on a new book on India and Asian geopolitics by Shivshankar Menon, a former Indian national security advisor.

What We're Following

Bangladesh's next wave. First it was India, then Nepal—and now it's Bangladesh suffering a major pandemic surge. The number of new COVID-19 cases in the country has averaged 5,000 in recent days, with more than 8,000 on Monday. Last Sunday marked a new record with 119 deaths, and nationwide positivity rates have reached 22 percent. This week in Dhaka, a city of 21 million people, authorities shut down most public transport, and the military began enforcing a nationwide lockdown on Thursday. The transport suspension and lockdown announcement have triggered large exoduses of migrant workers out of cities to their home villages—bringing to mind similar migrations in India last year.

Bangladesh's pandemic surge has been attributed to the highly contagious delta variant first detected in India. Delta has now appeared in nearly 100 countries, including Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Rare attack in Lahore. Pakistani authorities have moved quickly to investigate a blast that killed three people and injured 25 people in Lahore, Pakistan's second-largest city, last week. The attack was unusual: Terrorism is relatively infrequent in Pakistan's urban areas, and it took place outside the home of Hafiz Saeed, the head of Lashkar-e-Taiba, an India-focused terrorist group with close ties to the Pakistani security establishment.

No one has claimed responsibility, and Islamabad has not blamed any group, but officials have already arrested five people. One, identified as Peter Paul David, was detained as he tried to fly out of Lahore last Friday. Some accounts identify him as a Pakistani national, others call him a foreign national, and still others describe him as a dual national from Pakistan and either Bahrain or the United Arab Emirates.

India's cyber-deficiencies. India is one of 15 countries featured in a new report that ranks offensive cyber-capacities. The study by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies places India in its third and lowest tier, assessing that much of India's cyber-intelligence capacity has been directed internally and at Pakistan but that its competencies are weaker further afield.

The findings have implications for India's deepening rivalry with China, which the report places in the second-tier category. New Delhi is concerned about the growing risk of Chinese cyberattacks: Analysts and some officials have suggested that a Chinese hack of the power grid caused a large-scale power outage in Mumbai last October.

Under the Radar

Electricity pylons are blowing up across Afghanistan. The trend isn't new: Afghan power infrastructure has been a target of the country's relentless violence since at least 2016. But in early June, Afghanistan's main power utility stated that 23 pylons had been destroyed or damaged in a single month, causing power outages in Kabul and seven surrounding provinces. The Taliban and the Islamic State have claimed responsibility for some attacks. Afghan observers have blamed private criminal gangs and even government elements.

The energy security implications of the attacks are profound. Afghanistan only generates one-quarter of its electricity domestically, and many pylons transmit power from Uzbekistan and Iran. The vulnerability of its electricity infrastructure amplifies its connectivity challenges and presents yet another dilemma for a population already grappling with insurgency, terrorism, COVID-19, and drought.

“The Afghan nation is in [an] 1861 moment, like President Lincoln, rallying to the defense of the republic, determined that the republic is defended.”

In Pakistan Today, Mehmil Khalid Kunwar, who writes on social issues, decries the Pakistani government's failure to address the long-standing problem of so-called honor killings. Citing a recent case in Italy, she warns that "Pakistanis who live overseas also seem to follow this tradition, making sure they adopt everything they leave behind in their home country." An editorial in Sri Lanka's Daily Mirror lauds Namal Rajapaksa, the minister of youth and sports affairs and son of the prime minister, for speaking out on behalf of members of the Tamil ethnic minority languishing in prison. "If the trend continues, perhaps we can leave behind our baggage of ethnic, religious, and similar differences, and once again be Lankan first," it concludes.

In the Kathmandu Post, the author and management executive Sujeev Shakya contrasts the experiences of communism in China and Nepal, arguing that Nepali communists made the mistake of "mimicking the failed Indian communist model."



5 July 2021

Pakistan and the changing tides of global power

By Asif Haroon Raja

Asif Haroon Raja talks about major issues currently facing the world. From unresolved humanitarian crises to Pakistan's domestic political challenges, the pivot of geo-economics has shifted drastically and it is impacting all stakeholders. Recent times have seen upheavals at the global, regional, and domestic levels. At the global level, much against the expectations of a thaw in the strained relations between the US under Joe Biden and China-Russia, ego, and arrogance have come in the way of the change. The US considers China to be the chief threat to its global monopoly since China's rise has brought about a 'tectonic' shift in the global balance of power.

The world order has transitioned to a new power equation where the US and China are two poles with other centers of power adjusting to co-exist. Shifting power alliances and realignments currently underway portend a new power structure whose shape is yet to evolve.

The pivot of geo-economics has shifted from the West to the East, where China in concert with Russia would play a key role. The Indo-Pacific policy of containment of China by the QUAD (USA, Japan, Australia, and India) is bound to fail. Similar will be the fate of the US desire to make India the policeman of South Asia through multiple defense pacts.

Far-Right has gained strength in the western world while fascism and racism have heightened in the USA, Israel, and India. The US policy of military adventurism has narrowed its circle of friends, while the policy of peace, friendship, and shared

dividends pursued by China has helped it in enhancing its influence and circle of friends.

Gaza was once again viciously bombarded and the Al-Aqsa mosque desecrated by the Israeli forces in the holy month of Ramadan. During the 11-day slaughter and destruction, 265 Palestinians including 66 children were killed and hundreds wounded, while only 12 people were killed in Israel by the rockets fired by Hamas. The homemade rockets, however, for the first time dodged the invincible Iron Dome, which has become a cause of concern for Israel. Except for some token condemnations and protest marches, the Muslim world stood aloof. The two-state solution as envisaged in the Oslo Accord still remains a forlorn hope.

Although the Line of Control (LoC) in J&K has been quietened after the secretive understanding between the DGMOs of the two arch-rivals, no breakthrough has been achieved at the state level. India is not prepared to restore the special status of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) or to lift the lockdown and stop persecuting the Kashmiris. The Modi regime has intensified its efforts to change the demography of IOK. Like the Palestinian issue, the Kashmir issue is the oldest unresolved dispute lying pending in the tray of the UN since 1948.

Cross-border terrorism against Pakistan by RAW-NDS from Afghan soil continues unceasingly. Apart from striking targets in Waziristan and Baluchistan, Johar Town in Lahore was also targeted by the combined nexus of RAW-NDS-CIA-Mossad to kill interned Hafiz Saeed who has always been viewed by India as a big threat to its security particularly in IOK because of his huge followings on both sides of the LoC as well as in Punjab. Objectives were to get rid of this threat and also trigger religious Far-Right backlash in Punjab. Within four days the whole network was rounded up and the masterminds were identified by Punjab Police.

Various anti-Pakistan terrorist groups like TTP, Jamaatul Ahrar Lashkar-e-Islam based in Afghanistan, Baloch rebel groups (BLA, BRA, BLF) and Sindh based separatist groups have been unified by these agencies to create trouble in provinces. At the same time, the PDM has been instigated to recommence rallies to foment political instability. The hybrid war is targeting the Pak Army and the ISI to tarnish their image.

India's penchant for spreading falsehoods

False narratives and stories are still being woven by India's Chronicles which was busted by the Disinformation Lab in Brussels last year. The sole purpose of India's media war is to disrepute Pakistan and its institutions. The latest cooked-up story is the imaginary plot of some senior Pak Army officers to assassinate Gen Qamar Bajwa. It's a clear indication that Indian military leadership is fearful of him and sees him as a big threat to their sinister plans. The other wooly story circulated by Indian media is about the drone attacks on the Indian airbase in Jammu, which have been pinned on Pakistan. Logically the two bombs allegedly dropped on the airbase should have destroyed it including the warplanes and helicopters parked on the runway.

Interestingly, the bombs could only make two small holes in one of the barracks and did not cause any human or material damage which itself speaks of the lunacy of the allegation made. The purpose was to deflect the attention of the world from its fiasco in Lahore where RAW was caught with its pants down, to create another sensation, hide its atrocities in IOK, and win the sympathies of the world. It backfired since India once again failed to substantiate its accusations.

Yet another bizarre concoction that was floated by India was about the spy drone flying over Indian Embassy in Islamabad. For argument's sake, even if it is accepted as true, what was so strange about the drone flying within its own territory? While leveling this wonky complaint, India forgot that its spy drones have been repeatedly crossing deep inside AJK to photograph our posts and deployments along the LoC and in-depth, and every intruding drone was shot down. This year, three intrusions were carried out.

India's quandaries

The belligerence of Modi and his hawks against Pakistan has considerably mellowed down because of multiple factors. Its venture of integrating disputed IOK and promulgation of anti-Indian Muslim laws has backfired. The Sikh movement together with Kissan Tehriq and the Naxalite movement have become existential threats.

Covid-19 has spun out of control and the daily death rate is the highest in the world. It has plummeted India's rising economy into negative and BJP's popularity

has declined as gauged from the results of recent by-elections. Seculars in India have joined hands with the minorities to confront BJP's fascism and racism.

Externally, India has suffered several setbacks. India's plan to annex Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) was disrupted by China by taking control of important heights across the LAC in the Himalayas from where the PLA dominates the lone supply route to the KKH and GB. It is now faced with a twin threat for the first time. While Afghanistan has slipped out of its hands, it has also lost Iran after its ouster from Chabahar and railway projects.

Both the US and Israel are unhappy with India over its poor performance against China, and its failure to accomplish any of the objectives against Pakistan. More and more voices of criticism are now heard in the West after the scandal of India's Chronicles, Goswami WhatsApp chat, continued lockdown of Kashmiris since August 5, 2019, denial of basic rights, and demographic change. Iran has also snuggled away from India and has come into the loop of China after the latter signed a \$480 billion long-term agreement with Iran. While there is a thaw in Pak-Iran relations, Saudi Arabia and UAE have restored old ties with Pakistan and the former plans to install an oil refinery at Gwadar.

Pakistan has become closer to Turkey, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, some Central Asian States and is fast improving its relations with Russia and African countries.

Situation in Afghanistan

The US has been forced to end the 20 years' war in Afghanistan, which is a telling reminder of its failed policies. Pakistan played a pivotal role in bringing the Taliban and the US to the negotiating table and signing the historic Doha agreement as well as in starting intra Afghan dialogue to arrive at a political settlement.

While Trump was keen to pull out occupying troops by May 1 this year, Biden, influenced by the spoilers of peace, had second thoughts and was inclined to extend the date of exit. In the face of a rise in attacks by the Taliban, he had to announce in April that the withdrawal would be completed by Sept 11.

The bulk of US-NATO troops have already withdrawn, and 7 military bases including Bagram vacated and handed over to the ANSF. Reportedly, the

withdrawal will be completed by the end of August if not earlier, but the US intends to keep a small contingent of about 650 personnel in the Kabul military base for the protection of its diplomats in the US Embassy and probably for technical support to the ANA.

The Taliban will not accept the presence of a single foreign soldier and have also not welcomed Turkey's offer of taking over the security of Kabul airport. Washington has requested Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to temporarily house around 9000 Afghan drivers, translators, and workers employed in Bagram airbase and their families.

The Biden administration has pledged to expedite immigration visas for the Afghans who worked with the US forces, but the visa seekers are desperate to fly to safe havens at the earliest. To support the shaky regime in Kabul and the vacillating ANSF which lacks the capacity to confront the Taliban, Biden promised financial assistance to the visiting Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah.

Refusal to host US military bases

The US is also urgently in need of a military base outside Afghanistan, supposedly for counterterrorism against Al-Qaeda, Daesh, and the Taliban. With the fizzling out of Ladakh as a base, the US persuaded Pakistan to provide a military base and besides promising some goodies, it used coercive tactics with the help of FATF and IMF but Pakistan firmly refused.

Imran Khan stated that Pakistan is ready to cooperate with the US for peace and development of Afghanistan but not for war and conflict. Air corridor and land routes have been made available till the completion of the withdrawal of US-NATO troops. The three Central Asian states have also refused to provide military bases to the US because of Russian influence.

The desire for a military base outside Afghanistan after losing the war and the stated purpose of counter-terrorism is ludicrous. Al-Qaeda and ISIS were CIA creations. Obama had made a declaration in 2012 that the Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan had been effectively disrupted, dismantled, and destroyed.

Factually, the bulk of Al-Qaeda operatives had shifted to Arabian Peninsula in 2004 after the Bush administration opened the second front in Iraq in March 2003.

More than 600 Al-Qaeda leaders and operatives were caught by Pak security forces and handed over to the CIA who were shifted to Gitmo. So, against which Al-Qaeda the new US administration wants to carry out counter-terrorism?

Propaganda by the USA?

As for ISIS, after using it in Iraq and Syria, sizeable numbers of its fighters were airlifted in helicopters from the Middle East by CIA-RAW to Nangarhar in Afghanistan in 2014. After marrying them with Jamaatul Ahrar, an offshoot of TTP, they were pitched against the Taliban and also launched into Baluchistan and Karachi.

After the Doha agreement, most of the attacks on civil targets were the doings of Daesh, but the spoilers blamed the Taliban to disrepute them and the peace agreement. Lastly, the US has no moral right to carry out counter-terrorism against the victorious Taliban with whom it has signed a peace agreement and the Taliban are restraining themselves from attacking the foreign targets.

Having lost the war and forced to withdraw, and failing to acquire a military base, the only option left with the spoilers of peace is to resort to dirty tricks to keep war-torn Afghanistan simmering in the cauldron of instability and insecurity. India and the puppet regime in Kabul, whose days are numbered, are fully involved in the game of the USA.

This is the only way to lessen their pangs of shame and humiliation. They will make all-out efforts to create as many hurdles and problems for the Taliban to ensure that they fail in restoring peace and order in the country. With this aim in mind, the losers are frenetically circulating frightening scenarios and painting the Taliban as human-eating monsters, once again on the verge of snatching power. They are scaring the regional countries that in case of takeover by the Taliban and establishment of Islamic Emirate, all hell will break loose and it will spell disaster for the people of Afghanistan and for its neighbors.

Influenced by the propaganda, Russia, China, Central Asian States, Iran as well as Pakistan are keen that a broad-based Republic regime is established in Kabul and are uncomfortable with the idea of Islamic Emirate.

Failure in Afghanistan

While upholding this stance, seemingly they ignore certain historical facts and ground realities. Soon after toppling the Taliban regime led by Mulla Omar in Nov 2001, the US spent \$ 3 billion to form a Northern Alliance heavy regime in Kabul led by President Hamid Karzai. It accommodated all the notorious warlords and drug barons. The puppet regime ruled at a stretch till Aug 2016 after which an unnatural unity regime of Ashraf Ghani-Dr. Abdullah was formed, which in spite of its incompetence and corruption is still in power, and wants to remain in power in the future as well.

The two regimes completely failed to bring peace and prosperity to the country, which had remained peaceful, stable, and crime-free during the 5-year rule of the Taliban. The Taliban achieved this feat because of the imposition of the Islamic system based on justice.

Stability couldn't be achieved by the US-installed regimes in spite of the US spending \$ 1.5 trillion. Throughout the period of occupancy, the country saw bloodshed, death, and destruction. The US never made sincere efforts to build Afghanistan, eliminate poverty and illiteracy, provide jobs and make the lives of the people comfortable.

Peace talks with the Taliban in 2011 and the opening of a political office in Doha in 2013 were ruses to divide the Taliban movement and not to restore peace. Even after the Doha agreement in Feb 2019, the spoilers have been stoking instability in Afghanistan to find an excuse to delay the exit of occupying forces. The US-NATO-ANA forces were not showering flowers on the Afghans during their longest war, but raining molten lava causing over 5 lacs civil casualties. About 5000 ill-clad, ill-equipped ragtag resistance forces were kept on the run for 20 years at a stretch. It was a nightmare for them and they tried to survive in hell. Pakistan which was forced to fight the US war suffered the most, but India as well as those in power drew maximum benefits from the US largesse.

A difficult position for Pakistan?

With this background, what greater calamity can befall upon the Afghan Pashtuns in general and the Taliban in particular after the departure of occupying forces whose three generations have seen nothing but war? Will it become more unstable, lawless, and insecure under the rule of the Taliban who have learned lessons,

gained maturity and experience, and know the pitfalls of a civil war? In 1990, there were 7 Mujahideen groups of various ethnicities with no unity of command under one ruler. Conversely, the Taliban movement has remained united and focused, and it saw three Ameers, Mullah Omar, Mullah Mansour, and incumbent Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada succeeding each other with no discord. Haqqanis under Sirajuddin remain loyal to the Ameer.

It is befuddling that Pakistan is toeing the US line to let the Ghani-Abdullah regime share power with the Taliban under a Republic despite having suffered the most in the US imposed war on terror due to the perverse role of ANA heavy regime in Kabul which is in collusion with India. White House and the Pentagon once again tried to win over Pakistani leaders and officials. Given her long-term strategic interest as well as past experience, Pakistan cannot afford to even think of aligning herself with a power that is openly at loggerheads with China, Russia, and Iran, and strategically aligned with India.

Pakistan's nuclear program and the CPEC are eyesores for the US. More than that, it will be a mortal sin to betray the people of Afghanistan once again. Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the U.S still has unfinished business in Pakistan.

Pakistan's contrasting relations with the USA and China

Our Western friends never provided a security umbrella against expansionist India, and wasted our precious seven decades by making Pakistan run on a treadmill and obstructed its economic take-off. Pakistan-US relations overshadowed by mistrust and unequal partnership are still transactional in nature. The sword of the FATF hangs over the head in spite of Pakistan fulfilling 26 of its 27 points. Pakistan Foreign Minister rightly questioned whether the FATF is a technical forum or political? The IMF loan has become more burdensome after Saudi Arabia and UAE, at the behest of the US, took back their loans and facility of deferred oil payment.

Conversely, the spectrum of the Pakistan-China relationship spread over 70 years has become multifaceted. The CPEC, the flagship of \$ 1.3 trillion, and BRI have elevated the relationship to an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership. The CPEC which is equally beneficial to both has bound China to help in safeguarding

Pakistan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Successful completion of the CPEC by 2030 will realize the dream of Pakistanis for a prosperous, secure, and self-reliant country.

Domestic squabbling

Internally, the ruling PTI regime is up against formidable challenges. So far it has not been able to steady the dwindling economy or fulfill any of its lofty promises. Notwithstanding slight improvements made in the macro-economics, at the micro-level, no relief has been provided to the masses. Inflation and price hike are at a new high which has frustrated the people. Its lack of performance has diminished the charisma of Imran Khan as could be seen from the results in the by-elections in all the four provinces. It gave space to the PDM to push the government against the wall, but its disunity has given a welcome breather to the rulers who are also faced with internal cracks because of the emergence of a new group under Jahangir Tareen. This group has made the position of the PTI in Punjab and in the Centre tenuous.

Political polarization has blocked the government's efforts to carry out essential reforms and it is left with no choice but to rule by presidential ordinances. Sharif's family continues to pose a political threat since the PML-N vote bank in Punjab remains intact. The PPP under Bilawal in Sindh is exploiting the provincial autonomy under the 18th Amendment and has adopted a posture of non-cooperation. Bilawal and Sindh Chief Minister are flying to Washington to offer their good services if brought to power. Disturbing law and order in rural-urban Sindh and in Baluchistan where the foreign paid proxies have again stepped up terrorism, and negativism of social media are causes of consternation for the government.

Covid-19 is another big challenge for the ruling regime which has slowed down its development and socio-economic programs. It handled the first and second waves of the pandemic intelligently and is handling the third wave skillfully. The fourth wave is reportedly round the corner. China has extended full support to tackle the disease and provided vaccines free of cost. Now Pakistan has started manufacturing the vaccines locally, which will speed up the vaccination campaign. But the majority of the people living in rural areas are averse to vaccination and

see it as a ploy of Dajjali forces to depopulate the world. What is encouraging is fast track construction of the hydel power projects including the Mohmand dam which would greatly help in ridding the nation from the curse of the IPPs and would provide cheap electricity and overcome the water crisis. It will be very satisfying if the GDP rises from 3.8% to 4% as assured by the new Finance Minister. The graph of exports, revenue collection, and remittances from the expatriates are on the increase.

Pakistan needs to learn from China and take concrete steps to eradicate corruption, crimes, and poverty, to increase exports, improve governance, reform the state institutions, boost up agriculture and industry, and encourage the private sector.

A hybrid war to replace Afghan ‘forever war’?

by M K Bhadrakumar

The British newspaper Daily Telegraph did some kite-flying in the weekend that London is considering open-ended deployment of a contingent of elite special forces to Afghanistan “to provide training to Afghan units and deploy with them on the ground as advisers.”

At the same time, the New York Times reported that White House approves Gen. Austin S. Miller, the top American commander in Afghanistan, staying on at his post for “at least a couple more weeks,” although US troop withdrawal is complete. Connecting the dots, it appears that the US is trying hard to replace the forever war in Afghanistan with a Syria-like hybrid war. The stunning success Russia registered in ensuring the survival of the Assad regime in Syria provides a role model for the Pentagon commanders.

Thus, Miller will “help transition the American military mission” to a hybrid war. The Pentagon has worked out an “over-the-horizon capacity” whereby American warplanes and armed Reaper drones based mainly in the Persian Gulf will participate or back up the Afghan military operations against the Taliban. [read more](#) The US still hopes to reorganise the counter-terrorism capabilities and assets in the region. Foreign Ministers of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were recently invited to Washington for consultations to formulate backup plans that could allow the US to bank upon these two countries. Uzbekistan seems favourably inclined, prompting Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to visit Tashkent to follow up. ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#))

In effect, Washington is seeking to reposition some forces in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which means that the first-tier troops, drones, bomber planes, and intelligence assets to be placed at bases or appropriate facilities in these Central Asian countries remain available in real time for intervention in the war against the Taliban. As in Syria, local Afghan militia groups can be brought into the fight against the Taliban. Afghan warlords have worked with the Pentagon and the CIA

previously. Equally, the lobby of Pentagon contractors is very influential in the Beltway and the White House is all but certain to extend their contracts.

The grand strategy appears to be to:

In an interesting role reversal from Syria, the US will claim that its involvement in Afghanistan is at the invitation of the Kabul government.Indeed, if the strategy is seen to be working, other NATO countries can be expected to join the fray, as had happened in Syria and Iraq, embedded in the militia groups or Afghan military units.The strength of the Pentagon contractors is put at 18000 personnel, the bulk of whom have served in the US military previously. The activities of the Wagner Group in Libya and some African countries apparently provide an inspiring model for the Pentagon.The American media is awash with apocalyptic visions of Afghanistan's descent into civil war. This has helped generate domestic support in the US for the Pentagon and CIA's continued involvement in Afghanistan, even as President Biden extracts political mileage for ending the forever war.

Simply put, a hybrid war will be a “win-win” situation for the White House, Pentagon and the CIA — and NATO.

The bottom line is that for geopolitical reasons, the US and NATO are determined to remain as the dominant foreign presence on the Afghan chessboard. Washington visualises that the regional states — Russia, China, Iran or Pakistan — may have serious reservations about a long-term US / NATO presence in Afghanistan, but they will not confront the US.Will the US strategy of hybrid war work? A definitive answer will be possible only through August, given the variables at work. But the chances are rather bleak.The humiliating defeat at the hands of the Taliban has created a profound credibility problem for the US in the region.Besides, intrinsically, this is a high-risk strategy. The Taliban will resist and American lives may be lost. Again, the Central Asian states must agree to provide the staging posts for the hybrid war. The Taliban has sternly warned them.

Indeed, Russia and China are opposed to any American military presence in the Central Asian region. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has hit out at sections of Afghanistan's ruling elite who are collaborating with Washington's hybrid war plans, accusing them of trying to prolong the negotiation process and scuttle the prospects for an interim government.“They should think about the

consequences of these actions for their homeland,” Lavrov said. “Russia is already holding consultations both through bilateral channels and within the Collective Security Treaty Organization to protect its neighbours in Central Asia from any direct and serious threat,” Lavrov told reporters in Moscow last week. The remarks were obliquely referring to the US strategists.

But Moscow is not taking chances. Russia’s Southern military district (which includes facilities in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan) will receive advanced military equipment, including the Sukhoi-34 multirole aircraft. The air defence capabilities of the Russian base in Tajikistan are being strengthened, including with deployment of the newest Verba portable anti-aircraft missile systems (MANPADS). President Vladimir Putin had a call with Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmonov last week where he pledged all Russian support to strengthen Tajik defence capabilities. Most important, the Taliban’s success through the coming 6-8 weeks to batter, demoralise and destroy the Afghan armed forces and shift the politico-military balance in its favour will be a key factor in the shape of things to come. This is where Afghanistan is fundamentally different from Syria. The US is overlooking the big role Iran played in tandem with Russia to turn the tide of the Syrian conflict.

Meanwhile, Taliban has also shown savviness to prevent other Afghan groups from uniting behind Ghani as well as to create synergy between its political track at Doha and the military path in Afghanistan. Against the backdrop of the US’ plans to fight a hybrid war, the Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid told Reuters on Monday, “The peace talks and process will be accelerated in the coming days ... and they are expected to enter an important stage, naturally it will be about peace plans. Possibly it will take a month to reach that stage when both sides will share their written peace plan... Although we (Taliban) have the upper hand on the battlefield, we are very serious about talks and dialogue.”

The bottom line is that no regional state bordering Afghanistan wants the war to continue in any form. Within Afghanistan too, there is opposition to any further US military intervention. The cowardly manner in which the US troops slunk away from Bagram base will be talked about in the Afghan bazaar for a long time to come and will become folklore. [read more](#) Former President Hamid Karzai, who remains an influential figure in Afghan politics and internationally, gave a string of

interviews with the foreign media recently where his constant refrain has been that Afghanistan is done with the US interference, and Afghans should be left alone to manage their affairs. [read more](#)

Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar served the Indian Foreign Service for more than 29 years. He introduces about himself thus: “Roughly half of the 3 decades of my diplomatic career was devoted to assignments on the territories of the former Soviet Union and to Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. Other overseas postings included South Korea, Sri Lanka, Germany, and Turkey. I write mainly on Indian foreign policy and the affairs of the Middle East, Eurasia, Central Asia, South Asia and the Asia-Pacific...”

ARAB NEWS

July 06, 2021

Arab-American relations could yet return to former glories

Nadim Shehadi

There is one corner of the Arab world that will forever embody a different kind of Arab-US relations. Ras Beirut is the home of two universities that were originally established by American missionaries and which represent more than two centuries of interaction between American and Arab societies.

Whatever crisis exists in their current relations stems from the dealings of politicians and states, with both societies having to live with the consequences. But these problems are relatively new and barely date from the end of the Second World War, after which the US emerged as a global superpower.

The relationship that stems from the missionaries is more organic and deep-rooted — a people-to-people connection that predates state involvement and came during the formative years of both societies. America was a very different place 200 years ago; a nation in search of itself just over 40 years on from its war of independence. The missionaries found an Ottoman world in decline, with the Greek revolt of 1821 signaling the beginning of the end of that empire, which would eventually be replaced by nation states and new identities. It was an interaction of two cultures in transition.

Young puritans, both men and women, came from a New England that was undergoing a religious revival. They represented a minority of ardent evangelists waging internal battles at home with liberal republicans and with other less zealous denominations. What they brought was a conviction that everyone else in the world shared the same aspirations and beliefs once they understood them properly. What

they learned from us in the region was that this was not necessarily true, and that people with different beliefs can still share common aspirations.

This was their first real encounter with Islam and with Eastern Christianity, the portrayal of which was a great influence on the way they defined themselves. Although they mostly failed in their mission to convert, they were themselves exposed to new concepts that they communicated back home. The interaction with a diverse population broadened their minds as they gained respect for other faiths and accepted their values. Many of these lessons are still relevant to liberal debates in America today.

This was a two-way exchange. The missionaries found a local appetite for the schools they set up and a curiosity for the ideas they were spreading. They also encountered hostilities from the established clergy, whose influence was threatened by their endeavors, but this competition also had a positive result in that they raced to establish rival establishments, which triggered an educational revival.

The caricature description of protestant missionaries as “sanctimonious prigs and smug ignoramuses clueless about other cultures” mellowed somewhat through that exchange. Their educational establishments sowed the seeds of what became known as the Arab Renaissance later in the 19th century and were at the root of the Arab nationalism seen in the 20th century. This was certainly a win-win scenario for both societies.

This outcome encouraged exponential growth, with students recruited from throughout the Arab world and parallel institutions created to emulate the original ones elsewhere. The scaling up of human relations was reinforced through immigration and the presence of corporations such as Aramco, which brought many Americans to the region. They became a network of Arabists that maintained the relations between the two cultures. If these institutions represent US soft power in the Arab world, then the networks of these institutions — their graduates in all walks of life — represent the region’s soft power in America.

During the First World War, this notion was reinforced by an initiative from New York called Near East Relief, which raised more than \$30 million for the famine in Lebanon and for Armenian, Greek and Assyrian refugees. The King-Crane Commission after the First World War was seen as following the Wilsonian

principle of self-determination and recommended it for the Arab region. In fact, Charles Crane, an American philanthropist who was involved in the commission, became the sponsor of many initiatives to promote Arab nationalism, including George Antonius' book "The Arab Awakening" and the travel books of Ameen Rihani, which encouraged the image of a homogeneous Arab world.

The post-Second World War Point Four Program that promoted development in the broader region, including Turkey and Iran, contributed to a time when American influence was seen as a force for good, in sync with the way the US saw itself.

So what went wrong? That was the rosy picture and now comes the bad news. On balance, modern US policies in the region, be they in Palestine/Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen or Iran, have been catastrophic. America as a post-Second World War superpower is not the same country as before and it has different values. The impression now is that the US appeases its enemies and betrays its friends. But that is on the level of states; what is more serious is that there is a popular belief that the US is betraying its own values. In other words, there are expectations of support from America for the aspirations of the people of the region, but they are left mostly disappointed.

This includes policies since the so-called Arab Spring, where the US has been seen to turn a blind eye to crimes by the Syrian and Iranian regimes and their proxies. No one can really understand why the "red line" on the use of chemical weapons in Syria was not enforced and turned into a license to kill; or why Washington turned a blind eye to the Russian bombardment of cities like Aleppo and starvation sieges by Iranian proxies in support of the regime.

The expectation that the US would eventually support freedom over tyranny is best represented by the banners that people in the town of Kafranbel, in the Idlib province, posted on social media during the Syrian revolution. These were mostly addressed to the US in anticipation that it would protect the civilians from the Assad regime. There was a time when American influence was seen as a force for good, in sync with the way the US saw itself.

Since 2011, we have seen different demands in the region's protests and a departure from the nationalistic tones that were always imposed by regime-driven

mass demonstrations. Instead of supporting their leaders and burning American flags, the people of Iran, for example, are protesting against their leaders and avoiding the American and Israeli flags the authorities painted in the middle of the street for them to step on. It is not that they are pro-American as much as it is a message to the regimes that they can't be manipulated anymore, and that they have demands.

So the good news for the future of American-Arab relations is that there is still faith among the new generation that the US has values that are compatible with their aspirations and that it will eventually do the right thing, if it is better informed. There is also a belief in the fundamental principle that all people, whatever their faith or racial origin, aspire to the same values and desire them for each other.

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6 July 2021

Are Pakistani-Ukrainian relations problematic for Russia?

By Andrew Korybko

There are looming fears that Russia might become suspicious of Pakistan's growing military cooperation with Ukraine. However, unlike the US, Russia acknowledges Pakistan's right as a sovereign state to engage in "military diplomacy" with whatever other countries that it wants to as long as these efforts are not directed against Moscow.

There's been some discussion on social media in recent days about whether Pakistani-Ukrainian relations are problematic for Russia. Those who regard them as such believe that Islamabad should keep Kiev at arm's length considering that Foreign Minister Qureshi said during a call with his Russian counterpart last month that "relations with Russia are a key priority for Pakistan's foreign policy."

They are concerned that Russia might become suspicious of Pakistani strategic intentions, particularly its growing military cooperation with Ukraine, and that this might decelerate the pace of their ongoing rapprochement. Proponents of this interpretation are especially worried about Pakistan's decision to observe NATO's Sea Breeze 2021 exercises in the Black Sea. These well-intended individuals' views are understandable since they feel very strongly about the positive trajectory of Russian-Pakistani relations and therefore don't want anything to offset this exciting geostrategic development. Nevertheless, there's arguably nothing for them to be seriously concerned about.

Pakistani-Ukrainian military cooperation chiefly concerns Islamabad's arms procurement program and not the export of equipment to Kiev that could potentially tip the scales in its favor against Moscow. Moreover, Pakistan's

observance of the ongoing NATO naval drills is consistent with its status as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA). Russia's military cooperation with India is far more meaningful yet that has not harmed its ties with Pakistan.

Pak-Russia's strong ties

Russian-Pakistani relations have recently matured to the point where each country's ties with third parties don't negatively effect their partnership. If anything, sometimes the complicated state of their relations with other countries could actually serve to intensify their relations.

This might be the case when it comes to US-Pakistani relations. Prime Minister Imran Khan's (PMIK) principled refusal to host US bases, meet with the CIA Director, and participate in any more of America's wars must have been regarded very positively in Moscow. Russia also likely took note of the fact that US President Joe Biden has yet to speak with PMIK despite being in office for nearly half a year already. The American leader seems to be shunning his Pakistani counterpart.

The increasingly complicated nature of US-Pakistani relations is occurring in parallel with the improvement of Russian-Pakistani ones, but this doesn't necessarily mean that they are connected. Rather, the first-mentioned is due to Pakistan's refusal to continue behaving as an American proxy while the latter is the result of Islamabad deciding to diversify its foreign partnerships in order to avoid any disproportionate strategic dependence on a single country like used to be the case with the US.

US-Pakistani relations didn't worsen because of the Russian-Pakistani rapprochement and Islamabad's growing ties with Moscow are independent of its relations with Washington. Even so, it's natural that Russian-Pakistani relations will intensify against this backdrop.

Acknowledging Pakistan as a sovereign state

Returning back to the topic of this analysis, Pakistani-Ukrainian relations and in particular, the possible impact that Islamabad's observance of the Sea Breeze 2021 exercises might have on its ties with Moscow, this is presently a non-issue for Russian-Pakistani relations. Russia acknowledges Pakistan's right as a sovereign

state to engage in “military diplomacy” with whatever other countries that it wants to as long as these efforts aren’t directed against Moscow. Pakistani-Ukrainian military relations are aimed at procuring more equipment for the former’s armed forces. In addition, observing those earlier mentioned NATO drills is meant to maintain cordial relations with the US and NATO considering Pakistan’s formal military relationship with them.

Far more important to Russia is the practical state of US-Pakistani relations, which is currently very complicated. Moscow would obviously prefer for Washington not to retain any regional military bases following its impending withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 11th. Although it has no influence over Pakistan’s decision on the matter, it must certainly be pleased with PMIK’s independent foreign policy course. Any speculative Russian concerns about the impact of Pakistani-Ukrainian relations, especially their military dimension, pale in comparison to the importance of US-Pakistani relations’ presently complicated nature. That being the case, those who have recently been worried about Russian-Pakistani relations have nothing to fear.

Andrew Korybko is a political analyst, radio host, and regular contributor to several online outlets. He specializes in Russian affairs and geopolitics, specifically the US strategy in Eurasia. The views expressed in the article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Global Village Space.

Jul 1, 2021

India Looks West

Shashi Tharoor

A hostile China and the looming US withdrawal from Afghanistan have forced India to rethink its regional strategy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has thus sought to improve relations with Pakistan and engage with the Taliban – and for now, at least, it appears to be making the right moves.**NEW DELHI** – Recent conciliatory moves by India's nationalist government on its western flank have rightly aroused global interest. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi's calculus appears relatively simple. Faced with continued Chinese aggression on India's northern frontier and a likely Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan, improving relations on the country's western flank, with Pakistan, seems prudent.

In recent weeks, there have been reports of secret back-channel talks between Indian and Pakistani security officials – facilitated by the United Arab Emirates – aimed at easing bilateral tensions. A February 2021 ceasefire along the Line of Control separating Indian and Pakistani forces in the disputed Kashmir region has so far held, permitting an atmosphere of near-normalcy in the area. India has also been talking to the Taliban, which it long derided as surrogates for the Pakistani army, reflecting the increasing likelihood that the mullahs will reclaim power in Kabul following the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in September. Furthermore, India has kept two of its consulates in Afghanistan closed since last year, a long-standing Pakistani demand that it had resisted for two decades. And in late June, Modi's government held surprisingly amicable talks in New Delhi with 14 mainstream Kashmiri political leaders. Almost all of them had been arrested during the government's crackdown in the state of Jammu and Kashmir that began in August 2019, and had been demonized by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party since then. All of this points to a policy shift by a government conscious of the

pressures on India's northern frontier. Chinese troops have failed to disengage since the spring of 2020, when they advanced across disputed territory in the Ladakh region and later provoked a military encounter that took the lives of 20 Indian soldiers. With China doggedly refusing to withdraw, despite 11 rounds of talks, India's insistence on restoring the status quo ante looks increasingly forlorn. Hostility with China is likely to endure, in which case India cannot afford escalating tensions to its west. Indian-Pakistani relations are at their lowest level in recent times, owing to a series of incidents, beginning with the terrorist attack on Mumbai in November 2008 and culminating in the 2019 Indian air strike on Balakot in Pakistan. And the Indian government outraged Pakistan with its August 2019 decision to strip Jammu and Kashmir of its constitutionally guaranteed autonomy and reduce its status to a "union territory," directly administered from Delhi. The Pakistani government subsequently mounted a worldwide campaign, working especially with Islamic countries but also at the United Nations, to censure India and force it to rescind the move.

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Modi had remained implacable until recently, so the three-and-a-half-hour meeting with Kashmiri leaders was a surprise development. The leaders, who included four former chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir, spanned the spectrum of the region's main political parties. The Modi government had previously denounced some of them as corrupt dynasts, accusing them of milking the state for their own benefit. But now they were welcomed with sweet words and deferential protocol by Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah (India's second most powerful politician), and other senior officials.

The government's crackdown in Jammu and Kashmir has not achieved any of its proclaimed objectives – namely, to inaugurate a new era of peace and development, eliminate terrorism, break the political grip of a few families, and hasten the region's integration with the rest of the country. But it would be wrong to see the government's recent talks with the Kashmiri leaders as an admission of defeat. The discussions focused on three issues. One was an agreement to carry out,

with the Kashmiri parties' cooperation, a new demarcation of the state's political constituencies, which will likely enhance the Jammu region's representation in the state assembly. The other agenda items were elections across Jammu and Kashmir, and restoration of its statehood. Rather than a defeat for the Indian government, therefore, the talks seem to have shifted the goalposts. The earth-shattering news in August 2019 was the abolition of Article 370 of India's constitution, which guaranteed Jammu and Kashmir's special autonomous status. But that matter was not even discussed, because it was deemed to be sub judice (petitions on the matter are pending before the Supreme Court). Instead, the main issue was restoration of statehood, which the government had in any case promised "at an appropriate time." This could lead to a politically viable trade-off, whereby the central government gives Jammu and Kashmir statehood if state leaders agree to go quiet on Article 370 and leave the matter to the judiciary. If that happens, as seems likely, Kashmiris will have the illusion of wresting a concession while the Modi government's real victory – the revocation of autonomy two years ago – goes unchallenged by the Kashmiri parties. Meanwhile, Pakistan's global campaign against India to restore the state's autonomy has gone nowhere. Pakistan's leaders have their own reasons for wanting to resume dialogue with India, but they needed to see some movement from Modi's government to justify it. Talks with Kashmiri leaders leading to something like the restoration of statehood may constitute enough progress to warrant further discussions. The Indian government will thus chalk up another win if it enters new bilateral talks without making any real concession on the preconditions that Pakistan has been loudly declaiming for two years.

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These recent developments are early moves in a slowly unfolding regional chess game. The situation in Afghanistan, the implications of China's close economic ties with Pakistan through the Belt and Road Initiative, and the evolution of the insurgencies led by both the Afghan Taliban and its Pakistani equivalent, have yet to play themselves out. Simmering Kashmiri militancy could boil over, while Pakistan – if it is unable or unwilling to stem terror attacks from its territory on Indian targets – could again prove duplicitous in its peace overtures.

There are too many unknowns for any side to have victory in sight. But for now, at least, India appears to be making the right moves.

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THE EXPRESS

TRIBUNE

July 07, 2021

Pakistan's multiple security challenges

Talat Masood

The military and intelligence chiefs' in-camera briefing to the Parliamentary Committee on National Security augurs well for the civil-military relations and for strengthening national security. This session was essential considering that Pakistan faces multiple external and internal challenges that need a united national response. For developing a coherent policy there has to be clarity on the nature and extent of the threat. The political party's patiently and attentively listened and participated in the security briefing for nearly nine hours, whereas in parliament there is so much of rowdyism that seldom national issues get the attention they deserve. Let this be a turning point for addressing national issues seriously in parliament and Senate.

With the drawdown of US forces more or less complete, Afghanistan faces the spectre of another major escalation of the civil war. As the dominance of the Taliban is unacceptable to a significant cross-section of the Afghan population including powerful segments of the Afghan society, the spillover of the internal conflict would result in an influx of thousands of refugees trying to enter Pakistan and other bordering states. This has serious consequences for our economy and political stability. Anticipating this our army has fenced the Western border — a remarkable feat considering the terrain and security challenges, and strengthened its border force. Still the danger remains. Moreover, in Afghanistan there is no political party with a wide support base that can truly claim to be a national party. This is one factor that gives the Taliban leadership the opportunity to exploit the vacuum by using their military muscle and impose their writ. After the departure of the US forces the Afghan forces seem unable to counter the Taliban advance. And the future is dour. Perhaps the Afghan government never seriously prepared itself for departure of foreign forces and for the first time the Afghan armed forces will be left to themselves.

The Afghan army was neither trained or equipped to fight an insurgency. With more than 25% of Afghanistan in Taliban control and major provincial capitals surrounded by Taliban forces the situation is grim. The morale of the Afghan forces is low, their command structure is broken and, on many fronts, they are surrendering without putting up a fight.

What would or should Pakistan's response be to this fast-changing Afghan scenario? There is a broad consensus in Pakistan that it will recognise any government in Afghanistan that is acceptable to its people. But determining the people's will is not going to be easy in a political vacuum and especially when power is being gained through the use of force. Despite all the preparations that Pakistan has taken to prevent the influx of refugees and militants seeking hide outs in Pakistan's border regions the challenge remains.

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that had been pushed out of the tribal belt and is languishing close to our borders in southern and eastern Afghanistan is poised to engage in terrorist activities in Pakistan. Reports indicate TTP is being supported by BJP government and elements in Afghanistan that are hostile toward Pakistan and the Taliban are looking the other way. And the Afghan government is complicit or incapable of exercising its writ over its territory in which these groups are freely operating. In this situation, one option for Pakistan would be to strike at their bases in Afghanistan before they become too powerful.

The fate of the Afghan women in case of Taliban takeover is raising serious concerns among human rights organisations. President Ashraf Ghani's National Unity Government has done more to mainstream women in its governance and policy formulation than any previous government. This has resulted in substantial progress for women and girls in several fields of activity. Women are members of parliament and are ministers, and the danger is that all this may be reversed. Improved female literacy and education, better healthcare, all contribute toward promoting economic growth.

With India, PM Khan has made several attempts to engage with PM Narendra Modi but to no avail. Pakistan has pursued a consistent Kashmir policy based on UNSC resolutions. It wants that the will of the people of Kashmir should prevail in determining the future status of the state. If the US claims to champion human

rights then US President Joe Biden needs to address PM Modi on this issue. The BJP government in order to cover up its gross human rights violations in Kashmir and ill treatment of Muslims in general has resorted to serious anti-Pakistan policies. However, for expedient reasons, the US and Western countries are muted about India's gross HR violations in Kashmir and in India. In sharp contrast, the Chinese treatment of Uyghurs comes under severe criticism. Pakistan and the Muslim countries will continue to face similar discriminatory attitude. This is not to deny our shortcomings or weaknesses especially in the past in the field of human rights and our treatment of minorities. These need to be criticised wherever it occurs for our voice to carry weight.

It has been five months since President Biden has been in office but has not spoken to PM Khan. The silence is intriguing and in all likelihood is an indication that the president is conveying a message to Pakistan. What that message is, is difficult to decipher. Pakistan cannot be blamed for the chaotic conditions in Afghanistan for no country has suffered more than it has from the civil war and resulting instability. It continues to persuade the Taliban and other political forces to seek a political solution. The US cannot shy away from accepting responsibility of its policy failures in Afghanistan. Although the Taliban have seized control over large parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan has clearly stated that it will not recognise their government unless the people of Afghanistan give them legitimacy. As Pakistan has a greater influence on the Taliban than any other country, it has played an important role in persuading them to engage with other political groups and not imposing themselves through brute force. But still the Taliban are showing no willingness at this stage to engage with the Afghan government.

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July 4, 2021

Turkish military in Afghanistan: Mission hardly possible

By Andrei Isaev

NATO's plans to leave a Turkish military contingent after the withdrawal of all other troops from Afghanistan quickly came to dominate the discussion points among expert communities in different countries. On June 17 White House National Security adviser Jake Sullivan confirmed that an agreement to this effect had been reached in the course of a meeting between Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Joe Biden in Brussels. According to the diplomat, the Turkish military's responsibility zone will be restricted by the Kabul International Airport (assumably, in case of aggravation of the political situation this will guarantee an unimpeded landing of NATO's airborne forces).

From his part, Erdogan, keen on improving relations with Washington, announced this project right after talks with his American counterpart, having made it clear that its implementation would require diplomatic, logistical and financial support from the USA.

The choice of Turkey as a “watch” for NATO was not accidental. In the first place, because the slogan of jihad “does not work” with it. Furthermore, relations between the Turkish Republic and Afghanistan have a long history, having been officially formulated by an Afghan-Turkish Union Treaty in 1921. In recent years, Ankara has fostered its positions in the country, taking part in the restoration of Wardak, Jowzjan and Sar-e Pol Provinces. Turkey helped with the reforming of the administration, reorganization of the judiciary, education and healthcare, training of the police force and the military, and with the implementation of infrastructure and humanitarian projects. Finally, the Turkish military never participated in military operations – they chose to provide the patrolling and training of personnel for the Afghan army. Turkish diplomats with military ranks or without have established good relations with former President Hamid Karzai and Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, a member of the National Security Council and Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Commission for National Reconciliation, who is still an unofficial

leader of Afghan Uzbeks and Turkmen. These Uzbeks and Turkmen are often referred to as “external Turks”, while the area they live in is known as “South Turkistan”, which, according to the pro-government Türkiye, “is part of our (Turkish – A.I.) sphere of interests”.

The ambitious Turkish president is unlikely to be satisfied with an airport – he will want more. Some political analysts call for dividing Afghanistan into responsibility zones (if not influence zones!). The northern and central areas, populated by Turkic-speaking people, will go to the Turkish army, while the entire Iranian-speaking south will come under the Pakistani control. Tayyip Erdogan wants to guarantee the security of Kabul Airport (only this zone has been under discussion so far) with the help of Pakistani and Hungarian Air Forces (!). Apparently, the latter are wanted so that NATO allies will not suspect Ankara and Islamabad of a “Muslim conspiracy”. Besides, Turkey has traditionally felt a particular disposition for Hungary, seeing it as a “natural” ally in Europe and even including Hungarians into the “Turkic race”. “Hungarians failed to preserve the peculiarities of the Turkic race, because they adopted Christianity. Despite this, they set up the Institute of Turkic Studies in Budapest and this Institute deals with fundamental research into Turkic history”, – a textbook for university applicants says.

As for Pakistanis, the high level of trust between Turkish and Pakistani leaders paves the way for military and political cooperation. Turkey was among the first to recognize the independence of Pakistan, since then bilateral relations hinge upon military and technical cooperation. During the Cold War, both countries were members of CENTO, the year 1988 saw the creation of a Turkish-Pakistani military consultative group, and 2003 marked the formation of a joint body – the Supreme Military Dialogue. Ankara gradually became the second after Beijing supplier of weapons for the Pakistani army.

What marked a new chapter in rapprochement between Ankara and Islamabad was the Islamabad Declaration, signed by foreign ministers of Turkey, Pakistan and Azerbaijan and envisaging further political, economic and military cooperation between the three parties. No wonder that during the recent war in Karbakh the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan expressed readiness to render military support for Turkey’s strategic ally, Azerbaijan. The Turkish-Pakistani relations go beyond the military sphere: according to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut

Cavusoglu, about 100 Turkish companies are currently operating in Pakistan. Economic cooperation between Ankara and Islamabad is also facilitated by the participation of both countries in the Chinese One Belt – One Road Initiative, the medium branch of which is to pass through Pakistan and Turkey.

However, all this does not guarantee success. While Ankara's relations with official Kabul are working and workable, the Taliban (banned in Russian Federation) demand the withdrawal of all NATO troops, including Turkish, from the country. The Taliban have always refused to recognize the central government, considering it "the puppet of the West", nevertheless, they have been in talks with Kabul through Americans. However, the negotiating process did not stop Taliban from capturing another 19 administrative areas of the country over the past couple of months. We also need to remember that in the course of the civil war in Afghanistan there sprang up and took root other extremist groups, including Al Qaeda and ISIL (banned in the Russian Federation).

Attracting Pakistan to NATO's operation, Turkey hopes that "special" relations between Islamabad and Taliban (banned in Russia) will somehow protect Turkish troops from attacks on the part of the "students", or even lead to political agreements. But the matter is that the Taliban (banned in Russia) is an umbrella structure, not all of its branches listen to curators from Intergovernmental intelligence of Pakistan. The Taliban disrupted the Istanbul conference on Afghanistan, so they are quite capable of thwarting the military mission of the Turkish air forces. Finally, despite a torrent of peaceful statements from Pakistani authorities, relations between official Kabul and Islamabad are on the verge of an open confrontation. It looks like Kabul does not believe these statements. In mid May, the head of the Afghan National Security Council Hamdullah Mohib overtly described Pakistan as an enemy of Afghans and the ruler of Taliban (banned in Russia). Given the situation, Kabul's recent request to Moscow about restoration of technical assistance channels for Afghan air forces, which leaked into the press, can be interpreted differently. Russia's interest in establishing peace in Afghanistan is evident for well-known reasons. Equally evident is the adventurist nature of the Turkey-NATO plan. Given the situation in present-day Afghanistan, the Turkish servicemen will inevitably be dragged into an armed conflict and will thus have to pay for yet another attempt by Ankara to "find the much-wanted way to the heart" of the American president.

July 7, 2021

Losing the Narrative War in Afghanistan

by Obaidullah Baheer

With the U.S. withdrawal and rapid advances by the Taliban, the intensity of the Afghanistan conflict has reached unprecedented levels. In such escalated crises, society is polarized to an extent where pointing out government failures or any criticism of government policies is often perceived as criticism of the state and allying with the insurgency. Yet, accepting realities and constructive feedback is fundamental to gauging public sentiments and calibrating the failure or success of policy. The First Vice President Amrullah Saleh's recent denial that Afghan troops were surrendering without resistance indicates that the Afghan government is oblivious to the fact that it is losing ground in the narrative war. The Taliban are outmaneuvering the Afghan government by efficiently communicating constructed realities and promoting their cause. This translates into higher morale and conviction of Taliban fighters in comparison to that of Afghan defense forces. Although military experts with reliable field knowledge should assess the Afghan military strategy, the Afghan public also needs to assess the narratives produced by the government and the Taliban to separate myth from reality.

Narratives are employed to motivate fighters and legitimize group ideology. When conflicts protract beyond twenty years, the original cause of the conflict is often forgotten or changed. The conflict in Afghanistan has protracted long enough for the initial motives of both the Taliban and the Afghan government to dissipate. The Afghan government cannot expect the cause of defending the republic to be enough for its forces to fight with conviction nor can the Taliban use the call of expelling foreign troops as the driving force for its fighters. These changes in original motives are driving a narrative contest between the republic and the Taliban in three main aspects: the religious legitimacy narrative, the foreign agent narrative, and the impending victory narrative. The republic is currently losing the narrative war, as is seen in the little resistance shown by defense forces to recent

Taliban takeovers of districts. The government has continuously failed to recognize the importance of challenging narratives propagated by the Taliban and cannot expect victory without effectively competing in the narrative contest.

The Army of God

The Taliban's narrative on the religious legitimacy of its cause was largely overlooked by the Afghan government. Considering the Taliban are mullahs (religious scholars) and talibs (religion students), they were granted a level of religious legitimacy in Afghanistan. The Afghan government has been trying to convince religious councils inside Afghanistan and abroad to issue rulings that declare the Taliban's struggle un-Islamic. However, Sunni Islam unlike some Christian denominations and Shiite Islam, does not have a central jurisprudence authority. Thus, many Afghans find the rulings of local mullahs more reliable than rulings from external or foreign Islamic forces.

The government has continuously failed to recognize the importance of challenging narratives propagated by the Taliban and cannot expect victory without effectively competing in the narrative contest. A major reason why the Afghan government has not sufficiently tackled the Taliban's religious narrative is because it failed to provide alternative religious schooling. As the 9/11 commission labeled madrassas (religious schools) incubators of violent extremism, the Afghan government did not invest in government-run religious institutions to avoid scrutiny. This led to a dichotomy of government-run modern schools and Taliban-run religious schools in the country. Had the government built its own religious schools and dictated its curriculum, it could have managed to connect with religious populations, and, through this, contest the religious legitimacy narrative claimed by the Taliban.

Puppets of a Foreign Power

The other narrative the Taliban has used to derive meaning for their cause is the claim of fulfilling the religious duty of thwarting enemy forces by expelling foreign troops, a narrative that has shifted to dethroning the alleged puppet regime left by foreign tyrants. However, the government has somewhat successfully countered this claim by forwarding its own narrative on how the Taliban are foreign agents. Government officials, such as First Vice President Saleh and

National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib, have described the Taliban as Pakistani agents in their recent statements. This narrative is projected onto the battlefronts where military officers believe that losing land to Pakistan would bring shame to the country. The foreign agent rhetoric inculcates a sense of patriotism amongst the Afghan military, at the cost of deteriorating ties with neighbors like Pakistan.

Though the democratic processes and structure of Afghanistan are questionable, the country has an internationally recognized government, making the puppet state narrative forwarded by the Taliban appealing only to Taliban fighters. The government narrative that the Taliban are in fact little more than foreign agents is finding traction amongst the urban population. However, the government's efforts in projecting the Taliban as foreign entities serves to hide the government's strategic and political failures. By evoking hatred against the Taliban, it hopes to distract the populace from critiquing the national government. For instance, officials have been quick to point fingers towards Pakistan for the failing peace process but pass over their own failure to produce a consensus on a peace proposal for over a year. A matter of concern is also the targeting of journalists criticizing either the Taliban or Afghan government.

Victory, Near at Hand

The decision of the United States to negotiate and settle the conflict with the Taliban directly without involving the Afghan government and withdrawing from Afghanistan without defeating terror forces has led the Taliban to believe that it has defeated the United States and its allies. This narrative of defeating the world hegemon has created a sense of pride and momentum amongst the Taliban, which is then used to march onto Kabul. A sense of impending victory has muffled pro-negotiation voices within the Taliban movement and projects Afghan defense forces as the defeated. The Taliban's use of Twitter to broadcast videos of surrendering Afghan National Defence Forces and their messaging on their triumphs in different districts and cities is outdoing the government's efforts to appear a winning force in the current conflict. The government should deploy manpower to better utilize social media by broadcasting state victories. For now, considering the Taliban's aggressive messaging, the government should hold its ground and ride the current offensive out. It is highly unlikely that the Taliban can

sustain such an intensity for long periods post-withdrawal since the momentum is bound to wear off.

A sense of impending victory has muffled pro-negotiation voices within the Taliban movement and projects Afghan defense forces as the defeated.

The Colombian Path: Changing the Narrative

The lack of resistance to the Taliban is due to a plethora of domestic and regional factors. Yet, it is important to understand the vital role these narratives play in internal power politics. On the religious legitimacy front, the government could evaluate the utility of embedding religious scholars with its armed forces units or form a council of religious leaders that could create a sense among rural populations that their values are reflected within the state. The government of Afghanistan could also create a body of international and local experts that can advise the government on its communication strategies to successfully manage this game of narratives, much like former President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos did to reframe the conflict in his country.

Better messaging that broadcasts Taliban atrocities and balances out the Taliban use of social media would help in manufacturing support for the republic locally and internationally. The international community and regional players, in case of a prolonged civil war, would likely shift their stance on the Taliban with the United States and United Nations imposing sanctions, a preferred option as per Biden's interview regarding Afghanistan in February 2020. Documenting and broadcasting atrocities committed by the Taliban would help in realizing such sanctions and pressure on the Taliban. The Afghan Republic needs to start doing better at this narrative contest if it hopes to win support in what appears to be an impending civil war

July 9, 2021

Pakistan may face more threats and challenges in the days to come

Engr. Zamir Ahmed Awan

Forget Pakistan's contributions and positive roles in history, We may keep aside the functions of Pakistan in cold-war, the Afghan War in the 1980s, against the USSR's invasion, the War on terror in the middle east, or the US invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11 in 2001. The recent role of Pakistan, in bringing the Taliban to negotiating table and ensured the Doha deal to be reached satisfactorily. The safe withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan is Pakistan's facilitation. Pakistan has been providing land and air access to Afghanistan for the supply of food, medicines, and all necessities of life for Allied troops in Afghanistan. Even, while evacuating from Pakistan, yet, it is Pakistan providing a safe air passage for the troop's withdrawal. Particularly the recent role of Pakistan was acknowledged by the US administrations of President Trump for bringing the Taliban to negotiations and by President Joe Biden for providing safe exit and face-saving. Pakistan's positive role is recognized by many world leaders and international organizations.

Pakistan has learned bitter lessons in the past and has decided not to side with anyone in any war, aggression, or conflict. Pakistan supports only peace, stability, progress, developments, and prosperity. Pakistan cannot provide military bases to the US for attacks inside Afghanistan. It is a policy decision of the Government of Pakistan backed by 220 million brave Pakistanis. Furthermore, while stationed in Afghanistan for two long decades, supported by 46 strong allies, troop's strength reached 150,000, utilizing the most advanced tactics, weapons, technologies, the US could not achieve success, and how can airstrikes from outside Afghanistan bring positive results. Illogical! Irrational!

The US is annoyed on the refusal of providing a military basis to attack in Afghanistan in the post-withdrawal era. Let the international community decide the logic and rationale. However, Pakistan is cooperating and facilitating where ever it

is deemed necessary. Yet Pakistan is coerced, pressurized, punished, and targeted is beyond understanding.

Pakistan is struggling hard to come out of the grey list and has already satisfied 26 action points from the given list of 27. It is a big achievement. Its score is even better than in some of the most advanced countries. Thus, it is pathetic to note that some advanced countries with a score lower than Pakistan are still on the white list. It is ridiculous that these same countries are leading the propaganda against Pakistan. FATF decision is bias and discriminatory. Pakistani Government and the public are annoyed by this attitude. Let the international community judge the situation and stand in support of Pakistan.

As a matter of fact, FATF is being used as a tool to coerce other nations. This episode urges us to look at the history, evolution, and working of the FATF. Created as a result of the G-7 recommendation, it is a club of the powerful economic elite of the world. Since its inception, it has acted as a tool for G-7. It is an institutional form of an economic hitman. It has double standards. If look carefully, at the countries on the blacklist or grey list, all are political adversaries of the US or its allies. FATF has been politicized. Unfair! The FATF has miserably failed to name the most powerful money launders and facilitators, leave alone take action against them. The most shocking but commonly known fact is that paradises of money laundering are running the show of FATF. It is a slap on the face of the so-called international rule-based system of the West. FinCEN leaks are the most recent event, which has jolted the whole world. The leading banks of the West are the main facilitators of money laundering, knowingly or unknowingly. JP Morgan, HSBC, Standard Chartered Bank, Deutsche Bank, UAE Central Bank, and Barclays Bank are just a few examples. Almost forty banks in India are involved in Money laundering and India is involved in terror financing, yet, is not noticed by FATF. Besides, according to the FinCEN leak, London is the hub of major money laundering activities. It was reported to have links with about 3000 such companies. Already, a report by Transparency International, UK, has flagged around 86 UK banks and financial institutions for assisting dirty money holders in buying assets. The Rich countries are the beneficiary of money laundering. If the corrupt rulers of developing or underdeveloped countries stop depositing their black money in the developed countries, they might collapse immediately.

FATF also remained silent over the Uranium sale openly in India. It rang the alarm bells among the wider diplomatic, defense community, and experts. Uranium is extremely lethal and can play havoc with human lives, even countries. Terrorists can use it against civilians, which would be a huge disaster. It is not the first time that Uranium is being made available in the open market across India. It is not the first time, It has already happened before. Unfortunately, the FATF could not take an effective move. Although it has direct relevance with terrorism, rather, terrorist attacks, India is still enjoying immunity. Injustice!

Pakistan is observing the worst impacts of political victimization. The G-7 is using it as economic coercion. The media is using this opportunity to malign Pakistan and distorting its image. It also has economic implications for us as the international business community avoids doing business with grey-listed countries. There is a broader consensus among independent scholars that the FATF is being used against Pakistan as an arm-twisting tool. It is being used to compel Pakistan to bow down in front of the US and Western demands. It is the immediate reaction to Pakistan's refusal to provide a military basis.

It is an established open fact that Pakistan has been pursued and pressurized to leave the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). President Trump and his administration were hell-bent on convincing Pakistan to part ways with China and BRI or CPEC. It was even discussed at the highest levels. Think tanks, media, and digital space were all used to fan propaganda against the CPEC. President Biden's administration is no different from President Trump's. Rather, it is trying to further complicate the situation for Pakistan. He might be polite on the surface but hard at actions. However, Pakistan has refused to accept this pressure. Pakistan has made it clear that the CPEC is our need and there would be no compromise on our relationship with China. Just like many other countries, Pakistan wanted to keep good relations with all nations and our relations with China are not a threat to any other third country.

IMF is also being used to pressurize Pakistan. After refusal to grant Military bases, the IMF has applied strict conditions and undeclared demand "Do More". IMF under the US influence is also a political tool to achieve political goals and recently active in Pakistan.

The US is using various other political tools too, like the Child Protection bill, etc. There are many more threats for Pakistan in the days to come. The desperate US administration is blaming Pakistan for its failure in Afghanistan. But forget that as long as they were cooperative with Pakistan, Pakistan protected their interests and guaranteed that the US achieved all strategic goals in the region. The US military leadership understands the potential of Pakistan and its strategic role, but political leadership has a visible shift in its policies and ignored Pakistan in recent years.

THE EXPRESS

TRIBUNE

July 08, 2021

The Afghan civil war — is Pakistan at the crossroads?

Inam Ul Haque

The anti-Taliban forces are in overdrive in one ominous prediction after another about the looming civil war in Afghanistan, mainly because of the obduracy of the medieval savages, aka the Taliban, as if dithering on the Doha Accord was okay for Ashraf Ghani. And the liberal brigade is at the forefront, in a sullen fall from grace at the hands of these very ragtags.

Pakistan flip-flops quite uncharacteristically. On July 1, 2021, the Parliamentary Committee on National Security had a marathon in-camera session, attended by the COAS and DG ISI to brief the committee. Press coverage reveals some interesting positions. While desisting from being seen ‘overtly pro-China’, the presenters emphasised balanced relations with US and China and working on a relationship with America, ostensibly after the PM’s tough line on US basing/partnership in war etc. In response to a sly question, Shahbaz Sharif was apprised that the “PM had refused” to re-provide Shamsi, distancing the establishment. There are indications of strategic reorientation of our foreign policy, that has implications for CPEC and Sino-Pakistan relations.

On Afghanistan, the meeting was informed of Pakistan not supporting the Taliban “forming an emirate” as the 1990s, and that “the 18th century mindset is unacceptable.” That the extended troika (Pakistan, US, Russia and China) does not support a Taliban military takeover. And that Pakistan’s major strategic interest remains preventing Afghan territory from being used against Pakistan. This obviously is a fraction of our strategic interest(s).

That Islamabad frets over the estimated 6,500 Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters, joining hands with the Afghan Taliban, if Kabul falls. That this eventuality would embolden other violent extremist groups in Pakistan. That the TTP and the Afghan Taliban are “two sides of the same coin”. With dwindling influence on the Afghan Taliban, Pakistan expects around 700,000 new refugees, if the situation escalates. These are interesting iterations. First, re-pivoting to the

US/West is the cherished goal of our sold-out ashrafiyya (elite), tasked to keep Pakistan in the West's exploitative orbit, by scaring its leaders and creating hurdles for projects like CPEC and friends like China. Their penetration is deep and significant. Imran Khan might be a lone voyager. CPEC, one firmly believes, is Pakistan's only chance to break away from the US/western dependency. America, as a declining superpower is likely to be second fiddle to China in a not-too-distant future, making pivoting to its side, a poor choice.

Second, the US did not sign the Doha accords (ignoring the puppet and puppeteer, Ashraf Ghani et al) out of love for the ragtag. It was a sheer compulsion. For Biden's America, Afghanistan is a far away and insignificant foreign policy priority, a bottomless pit; unnecessarily distracting US policy from containing an unstoppable Middle Kingdom and a resurgent Russia; besides, domestically, addressing the worsening race-relations, crumbling infrastructure, faltering education system, Covid-induced poverty and economic stagnation etc.

The US, in tossing the proverbial Afghan "blanket", and hastening to exits is calling Ashraf Ghani's bluff leaving him no choice but to sit with a more conciliatory Taliban, that America considers more important. Why would it otherwise cut a deal with an enemy, it fought for 20 long years? The world gets it, only we seem to not get it.Third, the "18th century savages" are not replicating their 1996 version. Then, in a spontaneous reaction against lawlessness, corruption and lack of governance; the seminary students burst on the national scene routing the warlords. Then they were inexperienced in combat, governance, administration and media handling. Their 2021 version is experienced in running a credible shadow government for two decades under the nose of the US/NATO and Afghan government, providing security, administration and other services in all provinces, following a proper chain of command. They are media-savvy and very sensitive to their erstwhile unpopular legacy.

And Taliban²¹ are following an effective strategy. Nibbling spaces, dominating the night, ruling the countryside so effectively that even the US/NATO had been paying rahdari (toll) for their military movements; occupying areas surrounding major cities; emphasising on the peaceful surrender (tasleem) invoking Afghan brotherhood, and issuing reassuring broadcasts to allay fears and rumours are clever deeds.Taliban²¹ are experienced in diplomacy, negotiations and realpolitik.

Their year-long Doha parleys establish their credentials in dealing with a superpower, better than many states. They remain exposed to modern influences like education, foreign habitation and media in all forms. Realising the power of unofficial media, their footage regarding surrendered ANA troops, is poles apart from their 1996 model.

Fourth, militarily, they are getting boots on ground in the non-Pashtun highland (mainly north), sealing important borders. This suppresses potential challenges to their rule, stopping Central Asian support for such challengers. Pashtun east and south are theirs to take, as recent surrender of a Kandahar district validates. This is not the work of the run of the mill, the uncouth and the unschooled. Today, the Taliban occupy more areas than they did in the 1990s and follow a defined and efficacious chain of command, keeping well-informed of popular pulse, strategic dynamics and ground situation. So, who will fight them in the feared civil war? The warlords with no moral authority (if not foreign-supported), the politicians already in secret parleys with the Taliban, the dispirited ANA troops surrendering/fleeing in droves, the urban vigilantes and/or the general public? People lived under their shadow government all these years, despite the almost 50 nations keeping over 150,000 troops on Afghan soil. We do not seem to get it.

Yes, there would be panic flights, desertions and localised violence. Those desperate to flee are either complicit in crimes against the Taliban, or gullible and scared individuals, or opportunists fleeing for greener pastures. So, what to expect? With the north pacified through military presence, a tasleem strategy delivers rural hinterland to the Taliban. The restarted Doha parleys might lead to an outline political settlement. Pockets of defiance (if any), would resist till foreign patronage runs out (the Taliban purposefully captured Tajikistan crossing). And the Taliban patiently wait-out the fall of besieged cities, especially Kabul.

The Taliban would remain a US/West-reliant given the crucial US assistance (\$4 billion yearly upto 2024) and other aid under the Doha agreement. However, any dithering by the US would deliver Afghanistan to an eagerly waiting China, under the Belt and Road Initiative. A sullen India would reluctantly reach out to the Taliban, ditching Ghani (like Dr Najeebulah). Lastly, the Taliban rule may be the only chance for regional/neighbourhood stability. Pakistan and the US knew it

back in 1996. So, why is our ashrafiyya so afraid of sharia/Islam in our neighbourhood? China gets it, the Taliban get it, we do not.

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9 July 2021

How India has limited security options in Afghanistan

Andrew Korybko

As the US completes its withdrawal from Afghanistan, India is worried about a full Taliban takeover and is struggling to secure its interest in the war-torn country. However, according to Andrew Korybko, a political analyst, India has very limited options in Afghanistan, none of which credibly involve any conventional military involvement, contrary to widespread speculation about this scenario.

India is struggling to ensure its security interests in Afghanistan after the Taliban's lightning-fast takeover of broad swaths of the country in the wake of the US' full military withdrawal by September 11th. The South Asian state is concerned that the war-torn nation might become a training ground for Kashmiri militants, or even worse, that some Taliban fighters might consider crossing over the Line of Control (LOC) into the Indian side of Kashmir.

It should be kept in mind that the Taliban promised the US as part of last year's peace deal that it won't support any foreign militants, nor does it have a track record of expansionist plans outside of its native territory, but India still fears the aforementioned worst-case scenarios.

There's been widespread speculation over the years and especially in recent weeks that India might provide conventional military assistance to Kabul in order to stem the Taliban's rapid advance.

According to those who ascribe to that scenario, this could possibly involve arms transfers, intelligence support, actual troops, and/or private military contractors (PMCs). The first two options are the most credible since they entail comparatively low costs and almost no risks to India itself. The last two ones, however, are much

costlier in all respects. India's leadership must also certainly understand that if it's still struggling to contain what it regards as security threats in the part of Kashmir under its control, then it'll be much more difficult to contain the Taliban in Afghanistan.

India's security concerns in Afghanistan

Some further elaboration on this insight is required in order to better understand India's strategic calculations. Those who predict that India might commence some sort of conventional military intervention in Kabul's support are likely influenced by one or two ideas: that India is pursuing a policy of regional expansionism and/or to trap the country in a deadly quagmire.

They're not mutually exclusive either since accepting the first observation as valid can in turn be instrumentalized through a clever information campaign to influence India into taking the second seemingly natural step of getting itself caught in the Afghan quagmire due to its earlier described fear of the Taliban taking over that country. No matter how afraid India is of the Taliban conquering Afghanistan, there's almost nothing that it could do to stop this. Even in the best-case scenario of it dispatching military equipment to the internationally recognized authorities there on an emergency basis and ramping up its intelligence support for their forces, that likely won't be sufficient to stop the Taliban.

At most, all that it could do is temporarily delay what appears to be the inevitable outcome of the war. As for the third and fourth policy options, they'd fully depend on Iran passively facilitating India's military intervention since there's no way that Pakistan would support this. The incoming "principalist", "conservative" administration, however, might not be in favor of doing so. President-Elect Raisi is predicted to take a stronger stand against the US and its proxies upon assuming office. Although Iranian-Taliban ties are complicated, the Islamic Republic might balk at being portrayed as having anything to do with another foreign military intervention in one of his country's neighbors, especially one which would indirectly aid American strategic goals.

It's one thing for Iran to assist India's regional economic integration plans through the Central Asian branch of the stalled North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) and another entirely for it to approve the overflight of Indian forces and/or PMCs

to Afghanistan in order to fight the Taliban. Some secret agents might still transit through Iran to enter the country, but not on a large scale.

A pragmatic option for India

Under these conditions, the best that India can unilaterally do is the first two options that were earlier discussed. It would be much better for its long-term interests, however, if it explored the possibility of entering into secret talks with the Taliban. Some outlets reported that this happened last month even though New Delhi recently denied it. Nevertheless, that's the most pragmatic policy that India could follow at the present moment. It shouldn't wage a proxy war against the Taliban via Kabul and/or its own forces/PMCs but should prepare for the seemingly inevitable reality of that group returning to power to some extent in the coming future. They might still hold a grudge against India, but some level of dialogue is always better than conflict.

India's Russian ally is the most reliable partner to facilitate such contact if New Delhi had the political will to see this proposed policy through. Although Moscow still officially regards the Taliban as a terrorist group, it nevertheless pragmatically hosted its representatives several times in the Russian capital over the years as part of its efforts to advance the difficult peace process.

If Russia could talk to the Taliban despite that group having emerged from the US-backed Mujaheddin of the 1980s that was responsible for killing approximately 15,000 Soviet soldiers and wounding around 35,000 more, then there's no reason why India can't do so as well since it never suffered the same level of losses at their forerunner's hands. Speaking of Russian-Indian cooperation on Afghanistan, they could also jointly assist Tajikistan with bolstering its border security in the face of ISIS-K's presence along this frontier. Dushanbe might feel somewhat uncomfortable accepting Indian military aid considering its recent partnerships with New Delhi's Chinese and Pakistani rivals so it would be more acceptable for everyone if this assistance is coordinated through the SCO in which they all participate.

Afghanistan is an observer in this organization so each member's intelligence support could potentially be funneled through it in order to avoid any perception

among some that one or another country's relevant assistance to Kabul is somehow aimed against their interests (whether directly or indirectly).

Ground realities that India needs to understand

With this in mind, an entirely new plan might begin to take shape. Instead of seeking to defeat the Taliban through proxy warfare, something that's practically impossible to pull off since not even the world's most powerful military in history could accomplish this task directly despite its two-decade-long occupation of Afghanistan, India should moderate its security goals to containing the threat of ISIS-K's expansion into Central Asia. This would enable New Delhi to present itself as a responsible regional security stakeholder, especially if it coordinated such efforts through the SCO, perhaps by following Russia's lead in this respect if Moscow is the first to propose a multilateral campaign to this effect.

There is nothing that India can realistically do to stop the Taliban from training Kashmiri militants apart from retaining a very limited intelligence presence in post-withdrawal Afghanistan to possibly sabotage such efforts on an extremely limited scale.

Truth be told, however, that wouldn't even be necessary to begin with since the Taliban seems to be working very hard to improve its international reputation and therefore is disinclined to train any foreign militants no matter how sympathetic it may speculatively be to their cause.

Going back on its word concerning such a globally significant security matter would immediately raise suspicions about its grand strategic intentions and thus reduce the likelihood of it ever being accepted into the international community. Considering this, India should reconceptualize its security concerns in Afghanistan. The Taliban will most likely take over the country at some time in the future, after which it'll be cautiously welcomed into the international community for pragmatic reasons. Refusing to enter into dialogue with the group would therefore be a mistake for India's regional economic interests.

Its threat assessment should shift from the Taliban to ISIS-K, and India should accordingly coordinate its relevant security assistance to the Central Asian Republics and especially Tajikistan through the SCO, ideally under Moscow's

aegis. This proposal would enable India to present itself as a responsible regional security stakeholder while pragmatically defending its regional economic interests.

Andrew Korybko is a political analyst, radio host, and regular contributor to several online outlets. He specializes in Russian affairs and geopolitics, specifically the US strategy in Eurasia. The article has been republished with the author's permission. The views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Global Village Space.

July 12, 2021

Indo-Pak ties: back to square one**Kamran Yousaf**

When Pakistan and India issued a rare joint statement after talks between their senior military officials in February, renewing the 2003 ceasefire understanding, it came as a big surprise given the recent history of hostilities between the two sides. The two directors-general military operations agreed to honour the truce along the LoC, with the joint statement also speaking about addressing each other's core issues and concerns.

The surprise development compelled the people on both sides to think whether that was possible without backchannel contacts. However, the two sides publicly denied having any backdoor diplomacy despite media leaks suggesting to the contrary. As the ceasefire came into effect more details emerged which indicated that a third country facilitated secret talks between senior intelligence officials of the two countries. Held in Dubai in January, the meeting led to the ceasefire agreement. The idea behind the ceasefire was to pave the way for next steps. Both countries also quietly lowered the rhetoric against each other as part of the understanding. The next steps both countries were contemplating included restoration of diplomatic ties to the level of high commissioners. Pakistan was then also considering reviving trade ties but that did not happen after opposition by certain cabinet members.

But all these steps hinged on India taking certain measures that would address Pakistan's concerns on the changes New Delhi brought to the disputed Kashmir region. In private discussions, officials in Pakistan said India had assured that it would revisit some actions and at least take steps to halt demographic changes over the occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has repeatedly stated that it is ready for talks but for that India has to restore the pre-August 5, 2019 status of Kashmir. Prime Minister Imran Khan even said in an interview that Pakistan could re-engage with India if New Delhi gave a roadmap envisaging restoration of statehood. But despite those overtures, India never gave any hint of revisiting the Kashmir

situation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently convened an all-parties meeting of pro-India Kashmiri leaders but refused to give any timeframe for restoring the territory's special status. The lack of progress on these issues put the backchannel contacts in jeopardy. While the two sides struggled to find common ground through quiet talks, the June 23 terrorist attack in Lahore dealt a fatal blow to efforts seeking a rapprochement between the two neighbours. Pakistan, which lowered the rhetoric in recent weeks, publicly accused India of being behind the Johar Town attack. Pakistani investigations concluded that the mastermind of the attack was an Indian who had direct links with the Indian intelligence agency, RAW. National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf — who was not long ago elevated to this status, in hopes that backchannel talks would lead to some tangible steps — categorically stated that Pakistan had the evidence of Indian state-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan.

The Indian external affairs ministry rejected Pakistan's allegations and instead launched a counter-attack against Islamabad. The return of the blame game by both sides is a clear indication that efforts to seek normalisation have met a dead end. But given that both Pakistan and India are facing a two-front situation — India has to deal with Pakistan and China, while Pakistan has its hands full on both the eastern and western fronts — the two sides will have to keep the channels of communications open. For now, it is all back to square one!

July 11, 2021

The U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan Creates Uncertainty for Russiaby **Mark Episkopos**

As U.S. forces withdraw from Afghanistan, reactions in Moscow straddle the line between tepid satisfaction and open alarm.

President Joe Biden's announcement that the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan will end on August 31 prompted mixed reactions in Washington, drawing open criticism from congressional Republicans and measured skepticism from some of his allies. Concerns linger that Kabul lacks the resources to stave off a Taliban resurgence in the country and that the withdrawal could bring a deluge of unintended consequences ranging from widespread ethnic cleansing to the potential destruction of Afghani statehood. As America grapples with the implications of the withdrawal, similar discussions are taking place in Moscow — albeit with somewhat different framing. Russian political observers and Moscow elites did not miss their chance to underscore what they see as America's failure in Afghanistan, with political commentator and prominent orientalist Yevgeny Satanovsky calling the withdrawal a "shameful flight." Referring to the 1975 Saigon Embassy evacuations, Satanovsky added, "it's not even that they fled in panic, as in South Vietnam, but they scrambled quietly, leaving everything to the whims of fate."

Russian media seized on the accusations of Afghani officials that U.S. forces left the country's Bagram Airfield in the dark of night without notifying the base's new commander, who allegedly only learned of the departure more than two hours after the fact. Over the past week, Russia's major media outlets constantly ran footage of munitions stockpiles, armored vehicles, and other equipment reportedly left in the wake of the U.S. military's hasty retreat and subsequently looted by the Taliban. Russian commentators took the opportunity to draw what they see as a stark contrast between the Soviet and American experiences in Afghanistan. "When we left Afghanistan," Senator Franz Klintsevich told the Russian newspaper Vzglyad, "the government that we supported in Kabul controlled most

of the Republic's territory. Soviet forces did not just conduct military operations, but also humanitarian projects — the rebuilding of bridges, roads, and de-mining of territories. All of this contributed to the peaceful development of Afghanistan.” Still, others painted the hastiness and alleged secrecy of the withdrawal as a warning to “would-be” American allies such as Georgia and Ukraine: “We [the Soviet occupying force] behaved [in Afghanistan] according to principles. What did the Americans do in Bagram? They left and abandoned their so-called allies to deal with the consequences,” said Russian columnist Maxim Yusin. “Could you imagine if we [Soviet forces] did that in 1988 when leaving the Bagram airbase,” he added. But the vague sense of historical satisfaction over American failures in Afghanistan is quickly being overshadowed by more pressing geopolitical worries, keenly felt in the Kremlin and by Russian politicians. “Today the destabilization of post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia seems quite likely. It’s unclear how things will develop from here, how we will deal with the fact that the Taliban could win in Afghanistan and begin to expand and export Islamic extremism to adjacent states. That is a serious challenge for us,” Igor Korotchenko, a defense expert and member of the Defense Ministry’s public advisory council, said.

The Taliban is designated by Russia as a terrorist group, but that has not stopped the Kremlin from engaging with the group in recent years. The fruits of those earlier labors were on full display this week when a Taliban delegation visited Moscow to discuss Afghanistan’s future. Russian Senator Vladimir Dzhabarov expressed hope for the normalization of Russian-Taliban relations: “we will interact with any legitimate government of Afghanistan. If the Taliban becomes the legitimate government — of course we will improve our relations, but only on the condition they are not hostile to our country.”

The Taliban delegation, for their part, went to great lengths to reassure the Kremlin that they harbor no hostile intentions toward Russia or Russia’s Central Asian allies. The negotiators reportedly assured Moscow that they will not “attack the Tajik border,” adding that they will work to prevent the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from establishing a foothold on Afghan territory. Moscow remains committed to defending the territorial integrity of Tajikistan, which hosts a Russian military base and acts as a key buffer against inflows of militants from the broader Middle East into Central Asia and beyond. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a six-member Eurasian military alliance headed by Russia,

said on Thursday that it will marshal all the resources needed to defend the Tajik-Afghan border, following an earlier appeal for outside help by CSTO member state Tajikistan. Despite the military steps being taken to shore up the border, the Kremlin has been clear that there are no plans to deploy Russian forces in Afghanistan. "As for the continued military action in the absence of the political process, then the events on Afghanistan's territory concern us exclusively from the point of view of a possible spillover of troubles onto the territory of our allies," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. "The fact that the Talibs have occupied border posts on the border with Iran, on the border with Tajikistan... while this is happening on Afghanistan's territory, we're not going to undertake any measures except for our insistent calls for the political process, which all Afghans have said they support, to happen as soon as possible," he added.

The Kremlin is reluctant to unilaterally extend full diplomatic recognition to the Taliban, but, as implied by Dzhabarov, the political and military calculus behind Russia's current stance may change if the militant Islamist group emerges as the undisputed winner from its ongoing power struggle with Afghan government forces.



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U.S Exit and Impending Chaos in Afghanistan

Moomal Marri

After spending two decades on the rugged terrains of Afghanistan, another superpower has edged close to making its final exit from the often denominated ‘graveyards of empires’ that is Afghanistan. The U.S’ association with Afghanistan remains decades old, where it first entered into the battleground albeit not directly (and with the support of so-called mujahideen) in 1979.

The U.S initial forays into Afghanistan were premised to oust its main Cold War rival, the USSR. After concluding the Geneva Accords of 1988 and in the aftermath of the unraveling of the USSR and the winding of the Cold War, the U.S fled from Afghanistan, only to return a decade later.

Nobody knew the new re-engagement with Afghanistan, coming on the heels of widely derided 9/11 events and the subsequent declaration of War on Terror would only bode one of the U.S longest war of this century. Not even the acclaimed political pundits and military hawks occupying the Pentagon and the State Department would have envisioned such a flawed and indecisive end to their longstanding military engagement to the Afghan battleground.

The U.S has drawn closer to making its final exit in the backdrop of hastened U.S and NATO troop pullout from Afghanistan. The specter emerging from the vacated Bagram Airfield -the epicenter of the U.S counterterrorism and war activity to outdo the Taliban – is speaking the truth of this matter. Bagram Airfield has been officially handed over to the Afghan National Security and Defence Force in its entirety.

In the flurry of events, the news dominating the official quarters is yet limited to only troop withdrawal and the surging violence in Afghanistan. All attempt to

break the deadlock on peace talks has gone to naught. The deep introspection on the matter gives rise to the question of whether this would be the end to the war or is just a harbinger for a new civil war? The looming scenario points towards the latter option. Since the U.S announcement of the final withdrawal, the Taliban's offensives have picked pace. Although 2020 was the deadliest year in the history of the Afghan war, the signing of the Doha pact in February 2020 had spurred hopes that this violence would be tamed to facilitate the prospective peace talks between the Kabul government and the Afghan Taliban.

As no build-up on talks could be made, the position of the Taliban group seems to have hardened. The group has readily captured more than a hundred districts of Afghanistan. Sheer fighting is going on in 26 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Recently, the Taliban has advanced its footprints across the northern frontier and seized one of the main trade artery linking to Tajikistan. The heavy fighting and escalated violence describe the picture of Afghanistan.

Anticipating the Taliban's advancements, the Kabul government has ratcheted up its efforts to withstand the Taliban onslaught. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah are in the U.S to devise some kind of strategy. Additionally, the Kabul government is increasingly looking towards the regional militias of different provinces to aid in the fight against the Taliban. Also, it is contemplating having newer recruits to sustain the momentum. The defections from the Afghan National Security Forces are adding worries to the government's efforts.

Altogether, the emboldened Taliban insurgency is a worrisome factor for not only the Afghan government or the U.S, but for the wider region and Afghanistan's immediate neighbors. The apprehension on the Taliban's renege of its promises is griming the prospects of a peaceful Afghanistan. The group promised in the event of the inking of the Doha agreement that it would cooperate in charting out the peace plan for Afghanistan's future. To chalk out such a plan, agreement necessitated talks with the Kabul leaders. After several botched delays, talks began in September 2020, however, the endgame is still elusive with no concurrence for the interim government or any joint proposal. The future government setup too remains out of the sight with no unanimity for a republic or Islamic emirate type of political dispensation. Reports increasingly suggest that the Taliban are mulling an

armed capture of Kabul in the wake of U.S retreat. A U.S intelligence report says the Ghani government in Kabul could collapse within six months of the U.S withdrawal, revising previous estimates for two years.

The deadly rise of violence, the increasing footprints of Taliban across the country, the power vacuum caused by the U.S flight from the Afghan battlefield, the reinvigoration of local and regional militias, and the weakening authority of the Afghan government paint an ominous picture for the future of Afghanistan.

The resurgence of intense fighting, exploitation of the murky situation by Islamic State militants, and the demonstration of Taliban's intransigence on breaking the political impasse augur the future that would be mired into conflict, chaos, and more anarchy. Afghanistan's slide into chaos seems imminent considering the forceful resistance that would be presented by Afghan people, Afghan security forces, the peppered warlords, and their militias to any attempt by Taliban to override the country this time. This can ensue a new civil war in the war-wracked country for a foreseeable future. In the aftermath of incessant bickering between mujahideen fighters in the 1990s, the Taliban had a literal walkover in Kabul. Besides, they strongly pulled their regime by way of the strict enforcement of the Islamic Shariah, curbing all forms of dissent and secluding their emirate. This is not in congruence with contemporary Afghanistan, which has seen spaces for human rights, women's rights, education rights, and more efforts to orient the Afghan polity on lines of new international values. The security outlook is gloomy and unpredictable as the Afghan Security forces would not be able to sustain the heavy fighting given that U.S airpower support and logistics will be absent from now on.

Afghanistan's descent into chaos would not only be threatening for the Afghan nationals but will have a spillover effect on the region. The Afghan instability has been the predominant source of the geopolitical crisis encapsulating the entire region, where terrorism and extremism have become one of the defining elements of the societies. Any new war or crisis thus diminishes the prospects for connectivity and economic integration of the region.

July 11, 2021

Whither India?

By Dr. Arshad M. Khan

The US Federal cabinet currently has 24 members, the UK cabinet has 22, Germany has 14, France has 16 ministries but one person can be in charge of more than one. Therefore Mr. Modi's latest announcement regarding his new cabinet — he has had a reshuffle — might come as a surprise.

Mr. Modi, who has now fashioned his beard and hair to resemble less a politician than a mystic, is worried. His answer to the cataclysmic and mishandled covid epidemic and the slowing economy has been cabinet enlargement. His new government — try to guess the size (hint: imagine a number, then double it) — consists of 77 cabinet members. Exactly how and where this cabinet meets remains an open question. Given the enormous variety of India, one can wonder how many native languages the ministers speak and what will be the cabinet's language of discourse. Most people from the southern part of India are not fluent in Hindi. It leaves English or rather Indian English as a last resort.

Is India still a democracy? It is a question the Wall Street Journal asked in a piece on April 15, 2021, answering itself in the headline as ‘the answer isn’t so clear’. Swedish V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) describes it as an ‘electoral autocracy’ and Freedom House which assesses freedom across the world has changed its status from ‘free’ to ‘partly free’ (Indian held Kashmir Is designated ‘not free’). Particularly galling to Indians must be that they have now joined archrival Pakistan, to which they always felt superior in the democracy leagues, for it also is labeled ‘partly free’.

The essence of Indian democracy has to be respect for minorities and their rights ... for India is a land of minorities wedded together by the concept of Indian

nationhood. It is a country where 22 major languages are recognized in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. Thus labeled scheduled languages, these are spoken by 96.71 percent of the people according to the last census. Also 121 languages are spoken by 10,000 or more persons. Not just language, but religion also separates people. There are Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs in addition to the majority Hindus. Their numbers are not insignificant: Over 204 million Muslims, 20 million Sikhs, 8.5 million Buddhists and 28 million Christians constitute sizable minorities.

In George Orwell's Animal Farm, all animals were equal except for pigs who were more equal than others. In Mr. Modi's conception of his India, Hindus are more equal than others. Destroying the equality of minorities has the effect of rending the fabric of freedom and democracy. For example, his Citizenship Amendment Act legislates an easier route to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan; it excludes Muslims.

And Modi's renewed vigorous use of the National Security Act (NSA) — passed in 1980 after the end of Indira Gandhi's period of emergency — allows him to detain dissidents if considered a danger to India's security for up to twelve months — essentially a jail sentence without a trial.

THE EXPRESS

TRIBUNE

July 12, 2021

Afghanistan: a possible component of counter-quad or a quintet

Shahid Javed Burki

There are likely to be serious domestic consequences for Afghanistan once the American troops exit from the country. One result is that the American departure will be accompanied by the exit of a class of Afghan people the country would need for advancing national integration, developing its economy and modernising its society. There are reports that a thousand members of the country's security forces have left their stations in the north and escaped into neighbouring Tajikistan. But as I will suggest later, American departure could create some interesting and welcome opportunities for Kabul in the international field. The country could become an important participant in what I would like to call the "counter quad". I would get to an explanation of that proposition a little later.

Several senior American military and political leaders are of the view that the current government in Kabul would not survive for long under the pressure the resurgent Taliban are already exerting on it. The group has been emboldened by the hasty American withdrawal. If the Taliban do take control of Kabul, they may not be able to establish a strong presence in the country's capital. Their rise will be challenged by several ethnic militias who have been called into service by the government headed by President Ashraf Ghani. It is a move prompted by desperation. However, if a relatively strong authority emerges in the Afghan capital, it should be able to create a productive space for itself in the rapidly evolving global order. At the heart of this developing order is the growing rivalry between the United States and China.

The Americans have established an association which Shinzo Abe, the former prime minister of Japan, first suggested and named it the "Quad". This represented an understanding among four nations about military and economic underpinnings. In addition to Japan, the Quad includes Australia, India, and the US. Its main objective is the containment of the growing influence and reach of China. Countering China's rise is one issue about which there is agreement between

Democrats and Republicans in the American political system. Even though former President Donald Trump had entertained Xi Jinping, his Chinese counterpart at Mar-a-Lago, his resort in Florida, and called him his friend, he used several public policy instruments to push China into a corner. By calling the virus that caused the Covid-19 pandemic, the “Chinese or Wuhan” virus, he unleashed a dangerous anti-Asian-American sentiment in the US that hurt several people of that origin. However, it should have been expected that the Chinese would react to these verbal and policy assaults and this they have begun to do.

Cold wars have been around for as long as nations have been in existence. The most important of these was the one that was fought by the US and the Soviet Union for almost half a century — from 1945 when the Second World War ended to 1991 when the USSR collapsed and broke up into a dozen or so independent states. Another is now shaping up with the US and rising China. China is now the second largest economy in the world and is likely to overtake the US in a couple of decades. Even then, its income per capita would remain only a fraction that of the US.

The moves towards creating another cold war situation have been initially made by the leadership in the US. Although several centuries ago, Thucydides, the Greek sage, suggested that when a rising power threatens the one that has been in the lead for a long time, open conflict is almost always the result. He based his conclusion after studying the conflict between Sparta and Athens which led to a war between the two Greek states. That conflict became the subject of a long account by Homer and was central to the thesis developed in Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War. The war ended with the defeat of Athens at Syracuse and the rise of Sparta as the dominant Greek state. Thucydides is generally regarded as one of the first true historians.

In addition to imposing severe tariffs on Chinese imports and restricting the access of several Chinese firms to American technologies, the Americans also took note of the policies the Xi government was pursuing in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. The Chinese responded to these pressures in several ways. At the ceremony where the country’s political elite celebrated the 100th birthday of the Communist Party, President Xi issued a clear warning to his country’s detractors. Standing in front of the portrait of Mao Zedong that overlooks the Tiananmen

Square, he told the world that China's rise was unstoppable. The country, he said, would not be lectured. And those who tried to block its ascent will hit a "Great wall of steel". Several western news correspondents listened to the words of the Chinese leader. "The speech was laden with symbols intended to show that China and its ruling party would not tolerate foreign obstruction on the country's path to becoming a superpower," wrote Chris Buckley and Keith Bradsher for The New York Times. "Mr Xi has been building on a rise of public confidence since China suppressed the coronavirus relatively quickly last year while the United States, Britain and other democracies suffered waves of death. But the country must tackle challenges, such as an aging population that could slow growth. Mr Xi suggested that the solution to any problem demanded staying with the party." Party loyalty would help China overcome all the obstacles that would be placed in its way as it marched towards what was its destiny — a major world power.

The Chinese leadership is fighting the West led by the US with more than words. This brings me back to a discussion of the role Afghanistan could play in world affairs. It could align itself with Beijing and other regional powers to break the monopoly of the West in the global system. China is already moving in that direction. It is investing trillions of dollars in building a complex system of roads, railways, pipelines, and fiber optic cables to improve its connectivity with the world outside its western borders. CPEC is a part of what President Xi has called his country's Belt and Road Initiative, BRI. There is expectation that with the Americans gone from Afghanistan, the country would find it attractive to join the BRI as a partner and embrace the aims of the initiative. Also, once Kabul is fully in command of its own affairs, it may become a partner in a "quad" arrangement that would include along with itself China, Iran and Pakistan. The US has distanced itself from these countries, preferring to go along with those in Shinzo Abe's Quad. Such an arrangement would provide a counterpoint to the US-led association of countries in the Pacific. The US Quad was designed to constrain and bind China; the Chinese-led quad could release China's energies to the world to its West. Including Turkey in the configuration would result in the proposed counter-quad to become a "quintet".

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July 12, 2021

Climate: Too Little, Too Late?

William Alan Reinsch

The Scholl Chair's agenda for the immediate future includes a number of projects relating to climate and trade. We will shortly be putting out the first of two papers on the politics of the issue, and we will be doing other research related to the stalled Environmental Goods Agreement negotiations, the consistency of border adjustment measures with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, some intellectual property-related issues, and a look at some new approaches to sustainability. All that means I will be talking about climate from time to time in this column. Today is one of those times.

Our work so far has shown that the United States is not at the forefront of this debate. Thanks in part to the previous administration ignoring the issue for four years, other regions, notably the European Union, have forged ahead of us in developing and eventually implementing solutions. They are also ahead of us in framing public opinion. Climate denial has been dwindling in the United States, but the public still lacks a sense of urgency in dealing with the problem and is far from consensus, or even a majority, in supporting specific actions. The European Union, backed by greater public support, is grappling with specific actions and the details of implementation. It is a foregone conclusion that the European Union will do something—whether it will be wise remains subject to debate—while here in the United States, it is not so clear. As with many trade issues, the benefits of acting are long term and diffuse, while the costs are short term and specific. A shift away from fossil fuels, which is inevitable, will still cost jobs and hurt our energy companies in the short term, while the benefits of a slower rise in temperature, lower emissions, and as a result, more normal weather, are at best well down the road, and the cause-and-effect relationship will not be known definitively for years.

Thus the U.S. debate remains focused on short-term costs. People want change, as long as it happens to someone else. The consequence is that the Biden

administration's climate mitigation policies depend on carrots rather than sticks—financial incentives to transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewables, support for the development of new sustainable technologies, and support to individuals harmed by the transition, among other things. The administration has worked to enhance domestic production of green manufactured goods, including electric vehicles and batteries.

Biden's plan includes other incentives, such as a \$16 billion investment to create hundreds of thousands of on-site jobs plugging oil and gas wells and cleaning up abandoned mines, a \$40 billion investment into sector-based training and reskilling programs, and a commitment to ensure that displaced workers receive the pensions and health benefits they have been promised. This may be a politically wise approach. Congress is more likely to vote for carrots than sticks. But there is great concern in the environmental community that this will be too little, too late, and many believe that the administration should move more quickly to sticks—mandatory changes in corporate and individual behavior. The dilemma is that there is not (yet) sufficient political will to impose those measures, which leaves the United States in an uncomfortable position—knowing that it is doing too little but unable to do more.

Meanwhile, the world moves on. The European Union is once again demonstrating its fondness for being the first mover in regulation, just as it has been with privacy, digital trade, and artificial intelligence. Its proposal for climate border adjustment measures (CBAMs) is scheduled to appear July 14. Observers predict it will take at least two years for the proposal to wind its way through the European Union's parliamentary and member state processes and that the final product will be different from the initial one, but at least the process is moving. I can see this playing out several different ways for the United States. One possibility is that it will lead to demands here to take retaliatory action against what will be perceived as EU protectionism (even if it is not). That is not necessarily a bad thing if it leads to greater political support here for CBAMs, which will necessarily also require setting a price on carbon, something the United States has resisted. In that scenario, the motivation—retaliation—may be impure, but the result could be constructive advances in U.S. policy and public opinion.

Of course, another possibility is that the European Union's actions become mired in litigation in the United States, in Europe, and at the WTO, and public opinion moves in the opposite direction, leaving CBAMs and other measures even more problematic than they are now, with the public viewing them as some sort of perfidious European plot that cannot possibly be good for the United States. And, third, it is possible EU action will be ignored here, and we simply continue along our own, slower, path. Right now, I am not taking bets on the outcome. The important thing to keep in mind is the different pace of public debate. Development of climate border measures raises complex questions of measurement and credibility that cry out for an international agreement. The United States is clearly not ready to engage in that debate. Our public is not where it needs to be to support it, and our politicians, with some exceptions, have not been willing to get out in front of their voters. Until that changes, our domestic policies will be insufficient, and we will find ourselves reacting to the initiatives of others internationally rather than leading by example.

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Searching for leadership at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference

Dmitry Grozoubinski, Graduate Institute, Geneva

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12), originally scheduled for Nur-Sultan in December 2019, is now slated for December 2021 in Geneva. With less than six months to go, it remains uncertain where the leadership and compromise required for meaningful outcomes will come from.

Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala speaks during a press conference remotely on the annual global WTO trade forecast at the WTO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, 31 March 2021 (Photo: Salvatore Di Nolfi/Pool via Reuters). Ordinarily occurring every two years, MC12 has taken four, delayed first by the wise decision to avoid the Kazakh winter, then by the pandemic.

A worldwide trend towards discriminatory and protectionist measures has continued in the meantime. Development, business, consumers and investors have suffered as trade has become less predictable, less liberalised and easier to weaponise around political objectives.

The United States, once the self-identifying champion of the rules-based order, was an antagonistic force at the WTO for four years under the Trump administration. President Joe Biden has somewhat improved the tone, but the US position is still one of extreme scepticism toward the international trading system. With the United States yet to even confirm a WTO ambassador, few expect US leadership at MC12. Fewer still expect it to offer concessions to get multilateral deals over the line or end the Appellate Body appointments blockade.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2017 Davos address was interpreted by many as a sign that China was about to step up to global trade leadership. This has largely not materialised — made unlikely by China's position that its WTO accession commitments represent the full extent of liberalisation it should be expected to

make, and by its suspicion toward WTO reform conversations centred on new disciplines on state capitalism.

The European Union is likely to advocate for progress in areas such as the environment, gender and climate change. It is also a key player in many plurilateral initiatives. However, a bloc of 27 will always struggle to maintain the flexibility and agility shepherding multilateral negotiations to conclusion requires. The election of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as WTO director-general has sparked hope that her drive, energy and star power might kickstart a renaissance — expectations she has tried to manage. She has been relentlessly active on a number of fronts, and a reform of the WTO Secretariat is in progress. Yet her authority is severely limited and can't replace genuine engagement from members.

In the absence of leadership from major players or movement on central WTO mandate issues, it has fallen to middle powers to try to energise momentum in other areas.

Commendable efforts by the Australia-convened Cairns Group has seen dialogue on the agricultural domestic subsidy reform project, a key issue of contention since the Doha round. But still there seems little chance of progress here. An outcome would require significant commitments on subsidy limits from the United States and the European Union, at least tokenistic liberalisation from India and China, and either exemptions for or significant changes by small yet committed subsidisers like Switzerland and Norway. Talks on disciplining subsidies for harmful fishing practices are contentious but advancing, and a modest landing zone could emerge at MC12.

Plurilateral progress could also surface at MC12 in areas like e-commerce, investment facilitation and services domestic regulation. Soft law plurilateral initiatives that relate to gender or micro, small and medium enterprises could also advance given they are relatively inoffensive and do not create binding trade rules. Yet these plurilateral negotiations, while progressing, are still controversial.

Embraced to varying degrees by most members, the lack of consensus inherent in the plurilateral process is being denounced by some as contrary to the spirit of the WTO. Should any sub-group negotiations bear fruit, India, South Africa and other

opponents are likely to sour any potential victory, if moves like a refusal to extend the e-commerce moratorium don't do so.

The WTO is under pressure to deliver consensus outcomes related to COVID-19 pandemic management and recovery. A proposed TRIPS waiver for COVID-19-related goods would free governments from international obligations to protect patents on vaccines and other medical goods. Sparking heated debate about its usefulness, the proposal by India and South Africa has gained global traction including in-principle US support. Some speculate a deal could be reached by the conference or sooner.

Despite US backing, a deal could be elusive. The United States and others have signalled concerns with its duration and breadth, and revised proposals have not yet addressed the issues. The European Union has withheld support, instead tabling a counter-proposal keeping intellectual property protections in place and instead making compulsory licensing provisions already in the TRIPS agreement easier to use. Okonjo-Iweala is likely to push for some kind of WTO health outcome regardless. Her approach to dealing with the waiver thus far reveals her type of leadership. Rather than taking sides or stepping back with a non-committal ‘it’s in the hands of the members’ response, she has opted for a different approach. She has used the convening power of the WTO to bring together pharmaceutical companies, governments and intergovernmental organisations to foster coordinated action toward accelerated vaccine production and distribution.

MC12 has the potential to bring more such innovative convening experiments. Shaping outcomes to tackle the pressing challenges the world faces today requires coordinated action between governments, organisations, investors, business and consumers. With WTO members unable to provide the leadership or compromises for rulemaking, the WTO itself could wield its enormous soft power to effect change by leveraging its reputation for neutrality, its highly qualified secretariat, and the Director-General’s tremendous convening power and energy. It may have to for MC12 to be a success.

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Plurilaterals, a new online resource for information about plurilateral negotiations at the WTO.

July 14, 2021

CPEC & development of blue economy

By Dr Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan

CHINA-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has revolutionized every sector of macro-economy in the country. CPEC has become a magnetic force to gear up the process of massive industrialization and exports in Pakistan. It has further strengthened the concept of blue economy which is indeed the future of regional connectivity as well as international economy in the days to come.

For the further strengthening of Sino-Pak bilateral relations, realization of CPEC's strategic utility and scope Prime Minister Imran Khan performed the groundbreaking of phase two of the Gwadar Free Zone (GFZ) and launched a number of other mega development and infrastructure projects including an expo centre, agriculture industrial park and three factories. The Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong has termed these projects as 'making the impossible possible' in his most recent tweet.

The Prime Minister also inaugurated phase one of the GFZ, reviewed the progress on various development projects, and witnessed the signing of a number of memorandums of understanding (MoUs). A briefing was also given on the progress of the South Balochistan development package in line with the government's efforts of focusing on the province. He inaugurated numerous projects of agro-economy and livestock including Gwadar Fertiliser Plant, Gwadar Animal Vaccine Plant, Henan Agricultural Industrial Park, Hengmei Lubricants Plant, Gwadar Free Zone Phase Two, Gwadar Expo Centre. It is hoped that these projects would enhance the agro-economy of Balochistan and, of course, Gwadar. During his one-day visit various MOUs were also inked. He witnessed the signing of valuable MOUs including implementation agreement of 1.2 million gallons per day desalination plant and solar generators grant from China for South

Balochistan. Hopefully it will overcome shortage of drinking water and will start traditions of green energies in the province.

While addressing the launching ceremony for the projects, the Prime Minister pinpointed that inconsistent policy strategies and lack of any real implementation was the hallmark even towards common issues such as supply of water, electricity and gas, and connectivity with other areas in Balochistan. He projected Gwadar as the focal point of development for all of Pakistan and especially Balochistan. He said the “future of Gwadar” was being witnessed through the water and energy projects underway as well as the new international airport being constructed there which would connect Gwadar to other areas.

For the further development of Gwadar the Premier announced a number of initiatives to promote human development such as a technical college, a hospital, university, cheap loans for farmers and poor households and a program for uplifting of Gwadar’s fishermen. Prime Minister Imran highlighted the role of “One-Window” operation which would better facilitate and service investors to invest in free zones and set up plants and industries which could contribute to exports. He emphasized that increase in exports would lead to wealth creation, correction of macroeconomic imbalance and job opportunities once demand for technical staff and trained labour increases. Thus the role of Gwadar port and facilitation of CPEC is essential for future socio-economic prosperity of Pakistan and especially Balochistan. He instructed to develop an increased coordination between the federal and provincial governments to gear-up developmental activities and create a better atmosphere for potential investors. He thanked China in particular and said Pakistan stood to benefit from its relations with the country and said his office would directly and regularly monitor all progress on development projects in Gwadar on a monthly basis.

Gwadar has been rising with CPEC and many Chinese companies showed great interest to invest in Gwadar including Huang Weiguo (Textile), Huang Daoyuan Henan Dr (Technology), Fang Hongyan CMEC (Agriculture), Shen Jian Xiano (Wool Spinning Technology), David Dia Bioperfectus Advance Medical Technology), Chen Yi Royal (Dairy Processing), and last but not least, Bao Dequan (Saga Textile). Federal Planning Minister Asad Umar through his tweet said the free zone inaugurated by the Prime Minister in Gwadar’s north was “35

times bigger than the phase 1 industrial zone of Gwadar which reflects growing interest of Chinese and other investors in Gwadar free zone. Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani also addressed the event and said that a lot of work had been done by the government in Gwadar. He briefed about numerous initiatives and development projects such as the Eastbay Expressway, a 180-kilometre water pipeline which would connect multiple dams, a desalination plant, extension of the Gwadar hospital and efforts to bring a university to Gwadar.

It would start a new era of community development and participatory spirits of wellbeing in the province. On his part, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority Chairman Lt. Gen (R) Asim Saleem Bajwa said that work for Iran's trade through the Gwadar Port was in progress and the trade would start soon. He was of the opinion that the Ramadan-Gabd crossing point near Gwadar remained active and fully functional now and new border markets being established at the crossing points. General Bajwa said as compared to the first phase of the Gwadar Free Zone, which comprised 60 acres of land, the second phase would be a huge project comprising 2,200 acres. He said some 46 enterprises were engaged in phase-I of the free zone, while 12 new factories were being set up out of which three had been completed.

Moreover, he stated that water traffic at the port has been on the rise and keeps on increasing everyday and last year the trade volume increased by "hundreds of times" as 60,000 metric tonnes of cargo was transported during the year 2020-21 compared to only 1,300 metric tonnes in the preceding year. Even five LPG vessels were berthed at the Gwadar Port. With reference to cargo volume he said that it would increase at an even higher pace in the future as interest for transhipment and industrialisation was increasing with every passing day. CPEC has actually revolutionized landscape, geography, geopolitics, socio-economic orientations and basic development infrastructure of Balochistan and especially Gwadar. It has various mega projects in it which are creating new jobs, eradicating poverty, enhancing sense of human survival and speed up the industrialization process through Gwadar Smart Port City, physical infrastructure of Gwadar Port & Free Zone Phase-I.

provision of 4200 household solar power generation system (300 Wp), Gwadar Eastbay Expressway, New Gwadar International Airport, Pak-China Friendship

Hospital Gwadar, Technical and vocational Institute at Gwadar, necessary facilities of fresh water treatment, water supply and distribution Gwadar, 300 MW Coal Power Plant Gwadar, 1.2 MGD desalination plant, 5 MGD desalination plant, construction of breakwaters, dredging of berthing areas, Gwadar smart environment and sanitation system and landfill and last but not the least, Gwadar fish harbour & boat making industry on West Bay.

Being a prominent regional expert of CPEC & BRI I appreciate facilitations of CPEC for the development and transformation of Gwadar which guarantees the consolidation of the blue economy in the country.

CPEC has introduced new hope of a qualitative life and better future even among the local people.

It is suggested that an ideal combination of public-private model of integrated development should be followed in which local investors have equal rights and privileges to excel.



July 13, 2021

The Forever War in Afghanistan is Far From Over

by Patrick Cockburn

Over the last week, I have been watching the Taliban sweep across the map of northern Afghanistan, capturing places that I first visited in 2001 at the beginning of the US-backed war. Taliban fighters have seized the main bridge to Tajikistan on the Amu Darya, a river that I crossed on an unwieldy raft a few months into the conflict. The last US commander of the giant Bagram airbase north of Kabul, once headquarters for 100,000 American troops in the country, left in the middle of the night last weekend without informing his Afghan successor – who has said he did not learn of the final US evacuation until two hours after it had happened.

The most immediate cause of the implosion of Afghan government forces was the announcement by President Biden on 14 April that the last US troops would leave the country by 11 September. But the complaints of US and British generals that this is all happening too quickly for them to prepare the Afghan security forces to stand alone are absurd, since they have spent two decades failing to do just that. As western military intervention ends, it is worth asking what are the causes of this humiliating debacle. Why are so many Taliban willing to die for their cause, while government soldiers take flight or surrender? Why is the Afghan government in Kabul so corrupt and dysfunctional? What happened to the \$2.3 trillion spent by the US, trying, and failing, to win a war in a country that remains miserably poor? More generally, why did what was presented as a decisive victory by US-backed anti-Taliban forces twenty years ago turn into the present rout?

One answer is that Afghanistan – like Lebanon, Syria and Iraq – is not a country where the word “decisive” should ever be used about any military victory or defeat. Winners and losers do not emerge, because there are too many players, inside and outside the country, who cannot afford to lose, or to see an enemy win. Simple-minded analogies with Vietnam in 1975 are misleading. The Taliban

does not have anything like the military might of the North Vietnamese army. Moreover, Afghanistan is a mosaic of ethnic communities, tribes and regions, which the Taliban will struggle to rule whatever happens to the Kabul government.

The disintegration of the Afghan army and security forces has accelerated the Taliban's attack, which has often faced little resistance, and has enabled it to make spectacular territorial gains. Such rapid changes of fortune on the battlefield in Afghanistan are traditionally fuelled by individuals and communities swiftly changing to the winning side. Families send their young men to fight for both the government and the Taliban as a form of insurance. Swift surrenders by cities and districts avoid retribution, while over-long resistance leads to massacre. There was a similar pattern in 2001. While Washington and its local allies in the Northern Alliance were trumpeting their easy victory over the Taliban, the latter's fighters were returning unscathed to their villages, or slipping across the border into Pakistan to wait for better days. These came four or five years later, when the Afghan government had done enough to discredit itself.

The great strength of the Taliban is that the movement has always had the support of Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with a powerful army, a population of 216 million, and a 1,616-mile-long border with Afghanistan. The US and UK never sufficiently took on board that unless they were prepared to confront Pakistan, they could not win the war.

Other strengths of the Taliban are a core of fanatical, experienced commanders and fighters who are rooted in the Pashtun community, which makes up 40 per cent of the Afghan population. A Pakistani colonel commanding irregular Pashtun troops just across the border from Afghanistan once queried me about American and British efforts "to win hearts and minds" in heavily Pashtun southern Afghanistan. He thought their chances of success were low, since, he said, experience had taught him that a central feature of Pashtun culture was that "they really hate foreigners". Propaganda about "nation-building" by foreign occupiers in Afghanistan and Iraq was always patronising and unrealistic. National self-determination is not something that can be fostered by foreign forces, whatever their supposed good intentions. They invariably consult their own interests first and last, and the Afghan government's reliance on them delegitimised it in the eyes of Afghans, depriving it of roots within Afghan society.

The vast sums of money available because of US expenditure produced a kleptocratic elite. The US has spent \$144bn on development and reconstruction, but some 54 per cent of Afghans live below the poverty line, with earnings of less than \$1.90 a day. An Afghan friend who had once worked for United States Agency for International Development (USAID) explained to me some of the mechanics of how corruption was able to flourish. He said that American aid officials in Kabul thought it too dangerous for them personally to visit projects they were financing. Instead, they stayed in their heavily defended offices and relied on photographs and videos to show them the progress of the projects they were paying for.

On occasion, they would send an Afghan employee like my friend to see for himself what was happening on the ground. On a visit to Kandahar to monitor the building of a vegetable-packing plant, he discovered that a local company akin to a film studio would, for a fee, take convincing pictures of work in progress. Using extras and a suitable backdrop, they were able to show employees in a shed busily sorting carrots and potatoes, though no such facility existed. On another occasion, the Afghan aid official had discovered evidence of a fraud, though this time there had been little attempt to conceal it. After looking in vain for a well-funded but non-existent chicken farm near Jalalabad, he met with its proprietors, who pointed out to him that it was a long road back to Kabul. Interpreting this as a threat to murder him if he exposed them, he kept quiet and resigned from his job soon afterwards. Foreign aid has built real schools and clinics, but corruption has corroded every government institution. On the military frontline, it means “ghost” soldiers, and the garrisons of threatened outposts left without enough food and ammunition. None of this is new. Visiting Kabul and other cities over the years, I came to feel that the Taliban had limited support, but that everybody viewed government officials as parasites to be circumvented or bribed. In Kabul, a prosperous real-estate dealer – not a business normally sympathetic to radical change – told me that it was impossible for a system so saturated by corruption “to continue without a revolution”.

Instead, government failure has enabled the Taliban to believe that they can return to power within a year. Such a prospect frightens many people. What, for instance, will be the response of the 4 million Hazara minority, who are Shia by religion and are close to Iran? Earlier this year, bombs in Kabul killed 85 Hazara girls and

teachers as they left their school. As in 2001, the forever war in Afghanistan is far from over.

July 13, 2021

Biden Has a Problem: The Freeze on Student Loan Payments is Almost Over

by Rachel Bucchino L

More than 125 organizations sent a letter to Biden to uphold his promise of mitigating the student loan crisis and extend the payment pause.

A slew of congressional Democrats, student loan advocacy groups and Education Department officials are pushing President Joe Biden to extend the federal student loan relief program beyond Sept. 30, arguing that borrowers are still stuck in financial turmoil due to the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Borrowers first saw the relief program when Congress passed the Cares Act in March 2020, a bill that froze all federal student loan payments and set interest rates at zero percent. Former President Donald Trump pushed the relief deadline twice, followed by Biden who extended the pause until the end of September 2021.

But some student loan advocates are calling to lengthen the pause until March 31, 2022, while others have urged Biden to extend it until the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We’re calling on the administration to extend the pause on student loan payments to help support Arizona families as we continue our coronavirus recovery,” Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.), who joined more than 60 Democrats in writing a letter to the president in June, tweeted last week. “Extending the current pause on federal student loan payments will provide relief to Arizonans and help them continue to recover from the coronavirus recession.”

More than 125 organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), also sent a letter to Biden to uphold his promise of mitigating the student loan crisis and extend the payment pause.

It’s unclear, however, whether the White House backs the extension effort. Several opponents argue that if the Biden administration agrees to elongate the paused payment period, then the move would collide with the president’s messages over

working toward economic recovery. Student loan borrowers have experienced the pause for nearly 18 months, so an even longer extension would indicate that the economy “is so bad that student loan borrowers need even more time to pay student loans,” according to Zack Friedman, a contributor at Forbes.

And the pressure comes as the federal government is slated to end two separate financial relief efforts relating to the pandemic, including the enhanced unemployment insurance, along with the federal eviction moratorium implemented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ending on July 31. Both are not expected to be renewed.

But the president could eradicate the expanded jobless benefits and the eviction moratorium while extending the student loan repayment deadline, though that surfaces the question of “Why should student loan borrowers get relief when other essential relief is ending,” Friedman argued.

Friedman also noted that there’s reportedly no “distinction” between student loan borrowers who can afford to make their payments after September 30 and those who cannot.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has not explicitly supported or deflected the effort, though he did note at a Senate hearing last month that, “Extending the pause is something that we have had conversations about.”

Rachel Bucchino is a reporter at the National Interest. Her work has appeared in The Washington Post, U.S. News & World Report, and The Hill.

7/14/21

Biden's Iran Appeasement is Dangerous

Boris Epshteyn

A year ago, the Iranian regime was on its back foot. The Trump administration's pressure campaign was proving difficult for the terror regime to handle. Under President Donald Trump's leadership, the United States exited the failed Iran Nuclear Deal, reinstated a host of targeted sanctions and took out Qassem Soleimani, a terrorist responsible for the death and maiming of hundreds of Americans in Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world. The crushing sanctions imposed by President Trump caused financial tensions in Iran, and forced the regime to look inwards to reduce its outward exposure. Iran's terrorist proxies in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq began to falter.

Now, almost six months into Biden's term, an emboldened Iran is feeling the wind in its sails. In a rigged election last month, human rights abuser and hardliner Ebrahim Raisi was elected to become the country's next president.

The outgoing president, Hassan Rouhani, was certainly not the "moderate" the media portrayed him to be. Still, Raisi's rise to power represents a revitalized Iran that knows it can walk all over the weak and wavering Biden squad. Meanwhile, the White House appears to be fully pursuing an appeasement strategy. By removing sanctions on Iran and taking former Iranian officials off of the blacklist, Joe Biden and his team have pandered to Tehran, wasting the crucial diplomatic leverage they inherited from President Trump. Empowering Iran with billions of dollars in sanctions relief will not help the beleaguered Iranian people who have suffered at the hands of a murderous regime.

Biden's incompetence is likely to prove extremely dangerous. An emboldened Iran can endanger not only our nation's security and that of our troops in the Middle East, but also that of our allies. As the predominant state sponsor of terrorism in

the world, Iranian aggression can have dire effects on Israel, our greatest ally in the region.

Biden Warns Putin

President Joe Biden speaks about the American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, in the East Room of the White House, Thursday, July 8, 2021, in Washington. Evan Vucci/AP Photo

Earlier this week, in another brazen attack on Americans, Iranian-backed militias launched rockets directly at American forces operating in Syria.

The Biden administration hopes that resurrecting the nuclear deal can cause the rogue Iranian government to fall into line. However, the leadership in Tehran will not be deterred by appeasement. Unfortunately, history has proven that our adversaries perceive American largess as weakness.

Without justification, Iran refused to renew an agreement with international nuclear inspectors to keep tabs on its stockpile of nuclear fuel. It also commenced production of enriched uranium metal, according to the United Nations' atomic watchdog. Weeks before Biden was sworn in, Tehran began producing 20 percent enriched uranium and uranium metal, knowing full well that the incoming U.S. administration would allow the infractions to slide.

According to media reports, the sixth round of shuttle diplomacy just ended in Vienna without an agreement, but the administration plans to soon resume this waste of taxpayer dollars for a seventh round. President-elect Raisi has said he supports discussions to enter the nuclear deal 2.0, but has vowed not to allow Washington to drag them out. The Biden team's ineptitude has allowed a mass murderer and homicidal maniac to hold all of the leverage and call the shots.

Tehran has also developed and hoarded increasingly dangerous weapons systems, including deadly drones, far-reaching missiles and a trove of cyber weaponry capabilities. Any U.S. deal with the Iranian regime must recognize and rebuke Iran's willingness to use these weapons against America and our allies. U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price has affirmed that there is no hard deadline on the Vienna talks—no rush, apparently, as the Iranian regime amasses its dirty deeds. These words came just a week after Biden vowed to Israeli president

Reuven Rivlin that "Iran will never get a nuclear weapon on my watch." The president's statement rings hollow. Biden's treatment of Iran would make Neville Chamberlain proud and make Winston Churchill shake his head in disgust.

America, our allies and the Iranian people are all paying the price for Biden's utter fecklessness with regard to the Iranian rulers. Biden must follow President Trump's lead before it is too late.

July 15, 2021

Iran's Latest Ploy for New Nuclear Deal Is Doomed

By Stephen Rademaker

The Islamic Republic of Iran likes to argue that the United States is not a reliable diplomatic partner. It is therefore no surprise that after hardliner Ebrahim Raisi was elected as the country's next president, Iran added a new precondition to rejoining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. "We need guarantees that . . . a repeat of these sanctions and exiting the nuclear deal, as the past U.S. government did, won't happen again," declared Iran's lead negotiator, Seyed Abbas Araghchi.

How does Iran hope to achieve that guarantee? Tehran wants to require the United States to obtain the consent of the United Nations before it could withdraw again. So far the Biden Administration hasn't agreed, but it is under considerable pressure to do so. This new "red line" is so important that one senior Iranian official recently warned that Iran will not return to the negotiating table until Washington makes a "tough political decision."

Iran argues, with considerable justification, that it will be unable to realize the economic benefits of the removal of U.S. sanctions if potential business partners in Europe and elsewhere suspect sanctions relief is temporary and will be reversed by the next U.S. administration. But under U.S. law, there is nothing the Biden Administration can do to prevent a future administration from again withdrawing from the deal. The original JCPOA was adopted as a "politically binding" executive agreement, which made it easy for the Trump administration to rip it up. Senate ratification of the agreement, which the Obama Administration chose to avoid, would have made it legally binding — but not even that would have prevented President Trump from withdrawing. Presidents withdraw from treaties all the time.

Hence the proposal to superimpose a U.N. veto over America's right to withdraw. In theory, the Security Council could — if the Biden Administration's went along

— adopt a resolution prohibiting the United States from withdrawing from the agreement without the Security Council’s affirmative consent. Under the Security Council’s procedures, such a mechanism would purportedly give countries like Russia and China a veto over any U.S. decision to withdraw.

U.N. devotees undoubtedly believe that such a mechanism would make it illegal under international law for any future U.S. administration to withdraw without Security Council approval. But in America the Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and such a mechanism would not be considered binding by any administration.

There are multiple examples of U.S. willingness to defy “binding” Security Council resolutions. Then-Senator Biden actually led one such effort in 1995 to enact legislation violating the U.N. arms embargo of Bosnia. And certainly Iran hasn’t forgotten its claim that Trump’s withdrawal from the JCPOA violated the Security Council resolution endorsing that agreement.

These examples show that a U.N. veto mechanism would not actually work for Iran. It would, however, raise serious constitutional concerns. Imagine the congressional reaction were the Biden administration to contrive with Iran, Russia, China and others to limit U.S. flexibility to withdraw from an international agreement. Particularly if the Biden Administration chooses not to submit that same agreement to the Senate for approval as a treaty, as he seems almost certain to do.

The constitutionally prescribed mechanism for converting international agreements from politically binding to legally binding instruments is by obtaining Senate advice and consent to their ratification. Intentionally bypassing the Senate in favor of proclaiming to the rest of the world that an agreement has been made legally binding on the United States by action of the U.N. Security Council would make a mockery of the Senate’s constitutional role.

In reality, the only way to guarantee that any nuclear agreement with Iran will be respected by future U.S. administrations is by ensuring that the agreement is seen as politically legitimate across the U.S. political spectrum. That emphatically was not the case with the JCPOA. When that agreement was submitted to Congress under a law providing for congressional review of nuclear agreements with Iran,

strong majorities of both houses cast ultimately futile votes to reject it. Indeed, every single Republican in both houses voted no on the JCPOA, as did four Democrats in the Senate and 25 Democrats in the House. House Republicans are urging the Biden administration to comply with that same law should a new deal be reached with Iran, but the administration has made no promises. Should the administration decide to bypass Congress in implementing a new deal with Iran, it will lay the groundwork for opponents to claim not only that the deal is bad policy, but also that it was brought into force illegally.

Shortcuts like seeking ratification by the United Nations rather than the U.S. Senate, or bypassing Congress entirely, risk backfiring on any new deal with Iran, further diminishing its durability. What Biden and Iran need to do instead is negotiate an agreement that the administration is unafraid to submit to Congress because it is sure to command strong bipartisan support. Only then will Iran and its potential business partners be able to relax about what the next U.S. president may do.

Stephen Rademaker is senior of counsel at Covington & Burling and a former assistant secretary of state. The views expressed are the author's own.



July 22, 2021

A New Revolution in the Middle East

Jon B. Alterman

To hear some people describe it, the global energy transition is nigh. Widespread awareness of climate change has galvanized consumers and governments alike to get serious about abandoning hydrocarbons. The financial world has read the new sentiment and pivoted away from oil and gas. Investors are now pouring billions into renewables, and China sees renewable energy as a national security imperative. Soon, oil production will outstrip demand, and as prices fall, producers will produce even more to make up for lower volumes, suppressing prices still further. Oil prices are going to drop off a cliff. An alternative view is that the energy transition will take decades, and the built infrastructure to consume hydrocarbons ensures a robust market for many years. While electric cars get attention, approximately 90 percent of new car sales are still gas-fueled, and charging infrastructure is still billions of dollars and decades away. Existing homes have gas furnaces and gas stoves, and they last decades. Virtually all of the world's jet fuel is petroleum based, and the world is becoming ever more reliant on plastics, which are derived from oil. That is to say nothing of the developing world, where most of the world's population lives, and which often operates on smaller economic margins than wealthier nations. These countries' consumption is rising sharply as incomes increase, and they are likely to rely on existing equipment and technology for longer. While the wealthy can spend thousands on green products, for much of the world's population, oil and gas will remain the affordable and available fuels.

There are reasonable arguments for both of these views, and no one can say with any certainty how technology, regulation, or consumer behavior will unfold. For the Middle East, which scenario comes closer to fruition is of profound importance. Oil and gas revenues drive the region's economies, since the region is comprised almost entirely of energy-exporting states and labor-exporting states.

Poorer states send workers to the richer ones, and workers send billions back home to their families. The world's strategic attention to the region is also contingent on energy production. Religion and tourism will keep the region in the public's mind, but for governments, the region's irreducible significance is a product of global energy markets.

The idea that oil prices will drop off a cliff is predicated on the notion that oil is a market, and even small imbalances have large economic consequences. Today, global oil consumption is approximately 100 million barrels/day, and the system has relatively little capacity to produce more. When consumption threatened to outstrip supply in 2008, oil reached \$140/barrel. When the Covid-19 pandemic suppressed demand in the spring of 2020, the world began to run out of storage, and oil prices plunged. Saudi Arabia took the biggest hit, cutting production by about 20 percent while prices still dropped below \$30/barrel, less than half of their previous level. It took more than six months of reduced global oil production to work through the oversupply.

A sustained drop in global consumption, however small, would pressure Gulf countries to boost production in an effort to drive higher-cost producers out of the market and ensure that they are not left with even lower-value barrels in the ground when consumption drops still further. This partly explains the spat over production this month between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

We don't know who the winners and losers of the next decade will be in the Middle East. The increased volumes of low-cost producers might make up for lower prices, leading to a renewed strategic focus on Middle Eastern producers. Alternatively, the imperative of market discipline may fall to Middle Eastern producers, who would need to constrain production to prevent prices from collapsing. How this plays out will matter.

Governments throughout the Middle East have been preparing for a post-oil world for years, but they remain far from their targets. In the Gulf states, the transition from high-productivity, low-wage workers subsidizing the efforts of low-productivity, high-wage workers will take years. Private sectors strain to provide jobs for new entrants to the workforce, and youth unemployment tops 30 percent in many countries. Youth alienation is a problem every government is considering in

the decade since the Arab uprisings. It is a problem no government is convinced it has under firm control.

And the energy transition will matter for more than just the Middle East. Energy security drives much of China's recent investment in the region. If the Chinese government decides that its energy security derives from mines in Africa and not wells in the Middle East, we should expect Chinese attention and capital to shift. If there is a more enduring role for oil and gas in the global energy picture, more contestation between the United States and China for regional influence is possible. Finally, it is possible that Western states will turn away from hydrocarbons for ecological reasons, while China and the developing world remain devoted to them for economic reasons. This could manifest almost as a U.S. abdication of a future role in the Middle East, with China picking up much of the slack.

What is especially important to grasp here is how much of how this develops is beyond the ability of Middle Eastern governments to shape. The principal drivers of the global energy transition will come from outside the region. They will have a profound impact inside the region, and they will shape the way the region relates to the rest of the world. To hear some people tell it, that change could be profound, and it could be coming very soon. Jon B. Alterman is a senior vice president, holds the Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, and is director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. Commentary is produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a private, tax-exempt institution focusing on international public policy issues. Its research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

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Climate Goals and Renewable Deployment Need Competitive Electricity Markets

Richard D. Kauzlarich ,

As the U.S. joins the rest of the world in fighting climate change, it will be critically important that power generators continue integrating renewable energy into their portfolios. The challenge is to balance the variability that solar and wind power introduce while minimizing carbon-intensive generation. Monopoly utility models are not built to do that. Competitive electricity markets are the best way to integrate renewables—including distributed generation—and deliver affordability and reliability to American customers. Fortunately, the Biden White House's July 9 executive order recognized the broader principle to prioritize competition, and directed agencies across government to implement policies that ensure competition. The order stated, "for consumers, [competition] means more choices, better service, and lower prices."

The rationale should be obvious. Monopolies aren't incentivized to develop new technologies and cost-effective generation infrastructure. Instead, monopoly utilities are driven primarily by their guaranteed rate of return on existing investment. In the past, that model may have been good for Wall Street. Rarely did it create the best outcomes for customers or our climate change objectives. Recently, nine former Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulators sent a letter to the FERC arguing that competitive grid operators, known as regional transmission organizations (RTOs) and independent system operators (ISOs), are the best platforms to develop renewable energy sources and ensure optimal consumer benefits. Large-scale, organized wholesale markets allow the economies of scale to send the right signals to provide the least-cost, customer-centric approach to a low carbon or zero-carbon electrical grid.

Fighting climate change requires competitive markets operating at scale. That is where RTOs and ISOs come in. Typically RTOs and ISOs dispatch energy across several states, enabling them to integrate renewable resources with variable output, including solar and wind while lowering emissions. In fact, the former FERC Commissioners cited that "more than 80 percent of renewable generation has been deployed in the organized market regions, and emissions are falling faster in such regions." The competitive market model creates incentives to adapt to technological trends and customer preferences, including more renewables.

The outcome? Competitive markets reward innovation and deployment of new products. Consider that one of the nation's largest grid operators, PJM, saw carbon emissions drop 39 percent between 2005 and 2020 because of more efficient technologies. New York's competitive market experienced a 52 percent reduction in carbon emissions over the past two decades as price signals encouraged efficiency. Some advocates for utility monopolies have attempted to dispute this argument with cherry-picked data alleging the opposite. However, unbiased data from PJM and NYISO provide an accurate picture.

Monopoly models offer a different story, mainly because they are based on maximizing capital expenditures. As Pacific Research Institute economist Wayne Winegarden recently explained in Forbes, "Businesses operating on a cost-plus business have no incentive to implement innovations that will reduce customers' costs or improve service – in fact, the easiest way to earn revenues is to operate with bloated costs and then apply a percentage margin to this unnecessarily large cost structure."

Examples of this point abound. In Mississippi, Southern Company undertook a multibillion-dollar "clean coal" technology project in Kemper County, only to see significant delays and costs that ballooned from \$2.4 billion to \$7.5 billion. Reportedly, top executives knew of construction problems and design flaws years before the project collapsed and instead presented a rosy picture of Kemper's prospects to the public. They even used political influence to ensure a \$1 billion rate hike for construction costs. Without decisive action from state regulators, customers, rather than Southern Company stockholders, could have been on the hook for more than \$3 billion.

Further east, a project to bring nuclear energy to South Carolina shared a similar fate. The project, a joint venture between Southern Company and SCANA, was supposed to cost about \$14 billion. However, delays from accounting errors to poor management led SCANA to bankruptcy in 2017, even though SCANA's misleading of the public allowed it to sell more than \$1 billion in bonds and boost its stock price. In the end, consumers were left to pay \$9 billion for an unfinished project. It was customers, not their monopoly providers, who suffered, as the risk was shifted away from investors to a public with no choice.

This is not to say that competitive markets ensure mistake-free power generation, distribution and a cleaner environment. They enable the application of data technology at scale to improve the efficiency of electricity production while facilitating consumer demand for more renewables. In this regard, we can learn from Europe through increased cooperation with the European Network of System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E). European operators have had extensive experience with incorporating renewables into their grid—and we should learn from that. We will need to grow renewables to win on climate change, and we need competitive electricity models to get there. It is time to transition from obstructive monopoly models and adopt competitive electricity marketplaces that meet the future head-on with innovation and customer-centered solutions.

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THE EXPRESS

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July 26, 2021

Pakistan's tough foreign policy challenges

Kamran Yousaf

Earlier this year at the Islamabad Security Dialogue, a brainchild of the national security adviser, Pakistan's civil and military leadership announced a new vision for the country. PM Imran Khan and Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa agreed that Pakistan needed a paradigm shift in its policy to transform Pakistan from geo-strategic to a geo-economic hub. There was consensus that Pakistan needed to leverage its strategic location for economic gains. But this transformation was not possible without overhaul in our internal and external policies. It was one reason Pakistan started talking to India, albeit quietly, to lower the tensions. The backchannel talks resulted in the agreement by the two neighbours to restore ceasefire along the LoC which had been the scene of the worst clashes over the past many years. The idea behind seeking rapprochement with India was to have a peaceful neighbourhood — a prerequisite for moving to geo-economics.

While efforts were on to lower tensions with India, Pakistan was hoping for a peaceful end to the 40-year unrest in Afghanistan that held back the country's development. Pakistan has played a vital role in facilitating and brokering the Doha deal and intra-Afghan talks. The plan was for a smooth transition once the US and Nato forces withdrew from the war-torn country. The political solution to the Afghan war would also allow Pakistan a broad-based relationship with the US, one that would not be solely focused on security. An apparent ease in tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia has given an opportunity to Pakistan to take full advantage. Imagine if efforts to seek rapprochement with India were successful, the Afghan war ended peacefully, relations with Iran saw a new push after revival of the nuclear deal and ties with China further deepened — Pakistan's plan to market the country as a geo-economic hub would have become a reality.

But developments of the past few weeks suggest that Pakistan's challenge on the foreign policy side will only get more daunting. The push for easing tensions

appears to have backfired. After initial successes such as the LoC truce and lowering of rhetoric, the situation is now back to square one. The blame game has restarted as Pakistan publicly held India responsible for the Lahore attack, and India admitted it made sure Pakistan remained on the FATF ‘grey list’. All this means that backchannels failed to make any headway. On Afghanistan, the unfolding situation was not what Pakistan hoped for. Despite recent talks in Doha between the Afghan government and Taliban, the prospects of a peaceful end to the war are grim. Tensions are also deepening between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The recent ‘kidnapping’ of Afghan ambassador’s daughter led Kabul to recall its envoy. President Ashraf Ghani and certain leaders continue to blame Pakistan for the Afghan mess. The US is also not willing to expand cooperation with Pakistan beyond Afghanistan. Many months have passed yet President Joe Biden has not spoken to PM Imran. Despite Pakistan’s centrality to the Afghan issue, the US Secretary of State is visiting India. If that was not enough Pakistan’s time-tested ally China is not happy either after the Kohistan bus incident in which nine Chinese were killed.

In a nutshell, nothing is working on the foreign policy front. What has compounded the problem is deep political divisions discouraging internal consensus. The recent in-camera briefing arranged for parliamentarians was a good step but the PM’s absence suggested lack of seriousness on the government’s part to develop minimum consensus on the impeding foreign policy challenges. For now, it seems Pakistan’s foreign policy will be determined by events unfolding in the region rather than its desire to seek a transformation.

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Biden Should Be Wary of Erdogan's Afghanistan Gambit**Aykan Erdemir ,**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he wants to help the United States secure Afghanistan after the departure of American troops, but one has to question the reliability of an ally who admitted last week that Turkey, "does not have any conflicting issues with [the Taliban's] beliefs." Erdogan cast further doubt on his allegiance by suggesting the U.S.-led NATO mission in Afghanistan has been illegitimate from the get-go. "Imperial powers entered Afghanistan; they have been there for over 20 years," the Turkish president said.

These comments ought to serve as red flags amid ongoing negotiations between Ankara and Washington over Erdogan's offer to deploy Turkish troops to guard Kabul's international airport after U.S. departure. The airport is Kabul's lifeline to the outside world, providing access for aid workers and foreign diplomats."The president has made it very clear we're going to maintain a diplomatic presence in Kabul," Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said earlier this month. "We know that in order to do that, you have to have adequate security at the airport."

Entrusting the airport to the Turkish president may not be the wisest choice. Erdogan has a history of supporting the militant Hamas and even, for a while, the Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. He helped Iran evade U.S. sanctions and purchased weapons from NATO's leading adversary Russia.

Despite the hazards of trusting Erdogan, there has already been a marked softening of the Biden administration's tone toward the Erdogan government. This evolution began in early June, when Turkey's defense minister suggested that 500 Turkish troops now stationed in Afghanistan could remain to guard and run Hamid Karzai International Airport, assuming sufficient political, financial and logistical support

from allies. The Pentagon's Kirby said two days later that U.S. officials "have had ongoing discussions with Turkish leaders about their plans for security at the airport" and that this was "a national decision that President Erdogan has to make and we respect that." President Joe Biden speaks with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan prior to a plenary session of a NATO summit in Brussels, on June 14, 2021.

On June 10, a Taliban spokesperson insisted that Turkey should also withdraw all of its troops from Afghanistan under the terms of the February 2020 deal for the pullout of U.S. forces. This weakened Erdogan's hand ahead of his June 14 meeting with Biden—their first in-person meeting since Biden took office. Keen to capitalize on Biden's predicament in Afghanistan, which includes logistical challenges as well as the frustration of NATO allies, Erdogan revised his Kabul offer during the summit to include security cooperation with Hungary and Pakistan to protect the airport. Erdogan hoped that Pakistan and Qatar, which hold sway over the Taliban and are Turkish allies, would intervene on Ankara's behalf and reverse the militant group's opposition to a Turkish military presence in the war-torn country.

The Turkish government also made clear the limits of what it is willing to offer. On June 23, Turkey's defense minister stated that Ankara would not deploy additional troops to Afghanistan, besides the 500 already stationed there. Moreover, Turkey reportedly is not willing to take on any combat mission outside the airport and refuses to provide security for diplomatic convoys shuttling between Kabul's foreign missions and the airport. Meanwhile, Ankara's demands for financial and logistical support from Washington may prove excessive as when Turkey claimed from 2015 onwards that it would take over the counter-ISIS mission from the U.S.-led coalition in Syria, but refused to commit the necessary resources. There are also reports that the Turkish government is planning to deploy some 2,000 Syrian mercenaries to Afghanistan, as it did for missions in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh. This development is likely to draw the ire of the United States and other NATO members given the accusations of war crimes the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Syria brought against them last September, including hostage-taking, cruel treatment, torture, rape and pillaging.

The Taliban continues to voice its opposition to the presence of Turkish troops. The militant group went as far to issue a warning on July 13 that it will view Turkish forces as occupiers and wage "jihad" against them. A Turkish official downplayed the threat the next day, saying Ankara did not expect the Taliban to have a "hostile attitude." The two sides have not had direct talks yet. The Taliban even backed out of a proposed April peace summit in Turkey, dealing a blow to Erdogan's ambitions of becoming a key broker in Afghanistan. Erdogan's zigzags raise questions about the soundness of Ankara's game plan. On July 19, the Turkish president raised the stakes by calling on the Taliban to "end the occupation of their brothers' soil," in yet another sign of the buildup in tensions. The next day, however, Erdogan pulled a volte-face by making his comments about having no objections to the Taliban's beliefs.

Despite the flaws in his proposals, Erdogan appears to be cashing in already. Since Turkey offered to guard and run Kabul's airport, the Biden administration has toned down its criticism of Erdogan's transgressions at home and abroad. U.S. officials have refrained from condemning Ankara for its ongoing efforts to ban Turkey's second-largest opposition party, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party. Furthermore, the readouts of the June 19 and July 7 phone calls between Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his Turkish counterpart do not include any mention of ongoing U.S. concerns about Ankara's deployment of the Russian S-400 air defense system. Meanwhile, a Russian official announced on July 20 that for the delivery of the second S-400 batch, "final consultations are underway, a financial model has been put together, as well as a program for technical cooperation on the project." Erdogan might have the wrong impression that his ongoing negotiations with the Biden administration have provided him with the impunity to go forward with the second installment of a weapons deal that subjected him to sanctions last December pursuant to the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. The continued presence of Turkish troops in Afghanistan may ameliorate some of the risks in Kabul, but realistically it cannot offer a lasting remedy for Afghanistan's impending problems. As U.S. officials continue their negotiations with the Erdogan government for an airport deal that may never materialize, it would be wise not to exacerbate security threats elsewhere by giving Erdogan the impression that he can enjoy impunity on account of the Afghanistan deal.

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The rise of China and India's remote humanitarian aid

Lina Gong, NTU

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many disruptions to humanitarian action since 2020. As traditional donors struggled with domestic COVID-19 responses, emerging donors such as China and India seized the opportunity to increase their humanitarian footprint. Both countries provided humanitarian aid to over 150 countries and international organisations in 2020, with online technical support as one important avenue of their aid activities. Their move to online aid delivery conforms with a general trend in the humanitarian sector towards the greater use of remote humanitarian programming. One of the main motivations behind the shift to remote programming is the need to reduce heightened security risks in a world with shrinking humanitarian access. Remote humanitarian programming facilitates connections between international and local humanitarian organisations, which enables foreign humanitarian actors to connect to those in need without being physically present. This modality is not new in the humanitarian sector. In the 1990s, international humanitarian actors withdrew from fragile countries, such as Somalia, and relied on remote programming to provide aid to those in need.

In recent years, the safety and security of humanitarian staff have become increasingly compromised. In 2019 alone, 483 humanitarians were killed, wounded or kidnapped — the highest number on record. International humanitarian agencies were forced to relocate their staff away from high-risk environments and deliver assistance through national and local partners. But the relocation of international staff raises the concern that local humanitarian workers are left to bear the risks, which has led to calls for better protection for local humanitarian agencies. COVID-19 has significantly disrupted humanitarian action. Infection risks and travel restrictions have curtailed aid deployments. A reduction in air and sea freight, low handling capacity at ports and longer customs clearance times have disrupted international humanitarian supply chains. These restrictions have forced international humanitarian agencies to rely on national and local organisations to reach affected communities.

Technological advancement is facilitating the development of remote programming. Platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams and Blue Jeans improve communication and coordination between partners at local, national and international levels. Geographic information system data can be used to plan COVID-19 vaccine distributions, while drones are being deployed to deliver vaccines. Artificial intelligence and data analytics enable virtual collaboration, such as crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. Digital payment is being used in cash programming. But local humanitarianism comes with its own risks. It remains unclear what qualifies as ‘local’, how much capacity local actors have and whether donors can trust local humanitarian organisations to manage their funds. There is a funding imbalance between international and local humanitarian organisations, as many donors still prefer the former. But the pandemic has forced the sector to transform — today, partnering with local actors is the only game in town.

Remote arrangements can take different forms — such as remote control, delegation, support and partnerships. To truly facilitate localisation, local humanitarian organisations must be engaged as partners during the decision-making and planning stages of remote programming, rather than just implementing the projects. There also needs to be more emphasis placed on capacity building to strengthen aid governance at the local level to ensure progress made during the pandemic remains on course. COVID-19 has compounded pre-existing humanitarian needs and caused new emergencies. The United Nations appealed for US\$10.3 billion for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 for the period April–December 2020. To fill the gaps, it has become important for the humanitarian sector to explore new sources of funding and resources, such as emerging donors. China continues to emerge as an aid donor, most noticeably through its aid activities alongside the development of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI cuts through several Asian and African countries vulnerable to natural hazards and internal conflicts.

India has likewise been recognised as an emerging donor through its humanitarian assistance to countries in South Asia prone to natural hazards. Since the global outbreak of COVID-19, both China and India have launched diplomatic offensives by offering massive humanitarian assistance to countries and international organisations. An important part of this aid was video-conferencing and online training for health workers from aid-recipient countries. While their respective

humanitarian spending remains modest compared to traditional donors, China and India have material capabilities, experience in responding to natural hazards and public health emergencies, and political influence in the developing world. This has been the basis of their expanding humanitarian involvement. Yet both countries generally provide their support through national governments and international agencies. Their official aid systems still rely on direct financial assistance due to the limited capacity their domestic NGOs have to carry out overseas operations.

Remote humanitarian programming is providing a bridge for China and India to expand their humanitarian involvement overseas without needing to develop domestic humanitarian organisations. Both countries need to ensure that the design and implementation of these remote humanitarian programs include robust measures to monitor, evaluate and provide quality control. Governance is still a weak link in their aid programs and needs to be addressed if they want to become key players in the international humanitarian system.

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