



**CURRENT AFFAIRS
AND
PAKISTAN AFFAIRS
MADE EASY**

A HOLISTIC RECIPE FOR CSS/PMS ASPIRANT

**PUBLISHED BY
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**SPECIAL THANKS
TO
ENGINEER DANISH AZAD
ADVOCATE SAHIBZADA HANEEF**

WHY ONE SHOULD CONCERN TO CURRENT AFFAIRS AND PAK AFFAIRS MADE EASY?

- IT CONTAINS ESSENTIAL READINGS, WHICH ARE HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR A CSS/ PMS CANDIDATE TO HAVE A COMMAND ON DOMESTIC/INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.
- THESE NOTES WILL SAVE STUDENTS TIME AND PROVIDE THEM A HOLISTIC RECIPE TO ACE PAKISTAN AFFAIRS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PAPERS.
- THESE NOTES WILL BE PROVIDED TO STUDENTS ON MONTHLY BASIS.
- HOT CIRCULATED TOPICS WILL BE COVERED ON MONTHLY BASIS.

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FIGHTING CORRUPTION

POLITICAL stalwarts on both sides of the aisle are in the process of reviewing the controversial National Accountability Ordinance, 1999, in order to make it ‘just and fair’, particularly focusing on those draconian provisions and unfettered discretions that violate the recognised principles of the criminal justice system, and become the tools of ‘political engineering’ and persecution of political opponents.

This begs the question: would the purported reforms help evolve a system of public accountability that would be not only impartial and transparent but also robust enough to substantially contain, if not exterminate, the pandemic of corruption that is gnawing at the very foundations of state and society? There is no monosyllabic answer to this vital question, given the host of variables, other than the nature and extent of the intended reforms, which would bear on the success or failure of public accountability.

First, anti-corruption legislation alone, no matter how fair and robust, may not be enough to cleanse the system. In fact, we have had a glut of anti-corruption legislations, from the Public Servants (Inquiry) Act, 1850, to the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, to the current NAO, 1999. Moreover, in addition to the countless codes governing our public and political offices, we have also signed a myriad international conventions dealing with corruption and related ills. Yet, the bug of corruption does not seem to have been contained, let alone vaccinated against. Rather, it has mutated into many forms, metastasising across the body politic. Even the top organs — executive, parliament and judiciary — are not free from this plague, if the misuse of discretionary powers, horse-trading, and ‘political’ judgements are seen as a species of corruption.

Second, mere reliance on the extensive use of coercive measures may not help root out corruption. Since the 1950s, our military dictators have diagnosed corruption as a malaise spread by a ‘dirty nexus’ between the bureaucracy and its political masters. As a result, their favourite panacea has been to target the duo. But while hundreds of ‘tainted’ bureaucrats were summarily removed from service by successive governments, the public service saw no improvement in terms of efficiency or integrity. Likewise, a host of politicians were prosecuted on corruption charges, but many of them were either ‘co-opted’ by the same or subsequent rulers; or they were acquitted by the courts for various reasons — mainly due to insufficient evidence.

NAB reforms alone won’t help. A broader reform agenda is needed.

True to his peerage, Gen Musharraf also employed a lethal combination of muscular power and legislative sanction to launch his anti-corruption mission embedded in his seven-point agenda. Thus, he promulgated an ordinance in 2000 to ‘cull’ the bureaucracy by way of its “dismissal, removal, and compulsory retirement from service”. And to end corruption and recover the looted money, he brought the NAO, 1999, which was more in the fashion of Henry VII’s Act of Attainder.

The NAO, treats an accused a priori guilty, usurps his liberty, denies him bail, remands him for months, seizes his property at will, hauls him on tenuous links; and (until recently) provided him — the ‘corrupt’ — with the convenient tools of ‘plea bargain’ and ‘voluntarily return’ (of the ill-gotten wealth) to seek an (‘honourable’) exit. More importantly, the NAO created an enforcing agency, the National Accountability Bureau, or NAB, headed by a chairman who enjoys czar-like powers. Yet, for all the draconian powers at its command, NAB’s 20-year record has been less promising on the anti-corruption front, and more pronounced on the political front. While corruption is alive and kicking, economy and democracy are struggling.

Third, corruption thrives in a legal flux. It is because the laws take years to ‘ingrain’, and constitutions need decades to ‘conventionalise’. But unfortunately, Pakistan has been literally a petri dish of constitutional experimentations. We have tried a plethora of legal orders — presidential, parliamentary, hybrid, praetorian, and so on — but each order was supplanted at the altar of power politics. As a result, a rule-based public administration never got a chance to take root, leaving the bureaucracy at the mercy of a Byzantine machinery controlled by a bevy of power brokers — politicians, financiers, generals and so. But still, we haven’t learnt any lesson from the mindless revisionism. Efforts are on to bring the current post-18th Amendment Constitution back to the drawing board and again throw the country into a state of politico-constitutional limbo.

Finally, some undue enrichments are not culpable due to legal camouflaging. Our history is full of instances of rulers conferring favours on their cronies in the garb of economic, fiscal or public policy. Among the familiar bounties are tax exemptions, amnesty schemes, targeted subsidies, export incentives, write-offs, residential/commercial plots and so on. But since these ‘entitlements’ are policy-coated, multifaceted and deep-rooted, they are difficult to detect, let alone criminalise. Therefore, they are more detrimental to public finances. The recent sugar and wheat scams are a case in point. They are the re-enactment of old frauds, but it would still be hard for investigators to pin down the actual culprits, given the layers of decision-making, the cross-party spread of beneficiaries, and the firewalls of policies and condoning precedents.

In the light of the above review, let’s attempt answering the question — do the intended NAB reforms hold any promise? NAB reforms alone won’t help. A broader reform agenda is needed to address the systemic ills — legal, administrative, regulatory, supervisory, prosecutorial, and judicial — to tackle the menace of all-round corruption. To act on this agenda, concrete measures are required: never derail the train of democracy, respect the trichotomy of powers, fortify institutional checks and balances, minimise discretionary powers, strengthen parliamentary supervision, protect and autonomise the bureaucracy, end the culture of privileges and undue entitlements, and last but not the least, stop tampering with the Constitution for narrow personal, political or institutional interests.

INSTITUTIONS — THE HOLY GRAIL OF GOVERNANCE

Governance and institutions are two important components of a state. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 1997 report, governance is “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority, to manage a country’s affairs at all levels.” Institutions on the other hand provide the environment that constitutes a system of rules within which policymaking, administration, innovation, and cooperation occur. For many years, we have been hearing that Pakistan is losing on account of not having strong institutions, resulting in a governance pattern, which instead of creating harmony breeds confrontation. Our persistent outreach to the Monetary Funds (IMF) programme is a prime example of institutional decay. Plenty of issues concerning mistrust, arbitrary decision-making, and dysfunctions in institutions have further been exposed since the Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) intervention.

Let us begin by understanding what having strong institutions means and how it impacts governance.

At the start of the present century, the United Nations and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank started thinking about the ways and means to reduce poverty in the world through the process of growth and development. Each country was expected to initiate policies that would raise the standard of living of its people. An expanded middle class became the benchmark of a country’s progress, reflected in a high gross domestic product percentage. These milestones were not easy to reach because countries with a high poverty rate were the ones having poorly functioning public sector institutions and weak governance. Therefore, institutional reform was considered the first step on the ladder to development with subsequent policies to sustain their performance.

In Pakistan, institutional reform has become a cliché. Though every political party, their leaders, intellectuals, and activists are unanimous that Pakistan’s trajectory to economic development has been atrophied due to the politicisation of institutions, no effort has been made to improve the situation. Various diagnostic studies, particularly those that emerge from the Wilson Center’s frequent conferences on Pakistan’s development challenges, suggest that “every single crisis faced by the country — including low tax mobilisation, energy shortages, lack of law and order, losses of public sector enterprises, poor delivery of education and health services, and stagnating trade — can be traced back to governance deficits and institutional weaknesses.”

At present, the political environment is ripe with discussions on the credibility of NAB; a few days ago it was the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the crosshair; and before that, we were raising fingers at the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Service Corporation Limited under the nose of which wheat worth billions of rupees was stolen. Similarly, we have written and talked endlessly about the inefficiency of the police department. An associated issue has been of confrontation between regulatory bodies and their relevant ministries on the issues of corruption and maladjustment within their sectors. Each one of them had tried to shift the burden of their follies on the other. It is a pattern. Whenever a calamity strikes, instead of owning it and finding a solution, evasion is adopted as the best option to mar the process of accountability. It so happens because usually hiring in governmental departments is not done based on merit and most of the public sector organisations have been used as recruiting agencies to hire people on

political affiliation. In this scenario, institutions work at cross-purposes, a glimpse of which we saw in the aftermath of the Karachi plane crash report.

While the Ministry of Aviation was thrashing out unlicensed pilots from the PIA cadre, its regulatory body, the CAA, was handing them an umbrella. What an embarrassment it was seeing CAA denying having any pilot with a fake licence. This volley of disagreement left a bad taste in the mouth of the international market for Pakistan.

The political environment has become so hostile that issues among politicians are either settled through street agitation or with the intervention of the judiciary. Why is the judiciary overactive in Pakistan? Not because it is laden with excessive cases, which is a normal part of its functionality. The real reason lies in the number of political cases placed at the doors of the judiciary. Our political parties, their leaders, and the politicians cannot communicate on issues with the ability to reach a consensus on common grounds. It is this vacuum that has been taken advantage of by the third force leading to either coups, conspiracies, or unending controversies undermining the legitimacy of both the government and the opposition.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had also been the victim of intra-departmental and intra-provincial rivalries because of which Pakistan had difficulty achieving terms and conditions that would have benefited Pakistan. In corollary, the full benefits of the project that lied in small and medium-size business plans and the creation of economic zones are still to be derived. To prevent any further damages the command of the CPEC Authority has been given to an organisation, purportedly, more organised, and hierarchical.

The challenges that Pakistan faces — such as, population growth, urbanisation, federal decentralisation, climate change, and water scarcity, among other issues — demand fundamental reform of the institutions. The first step to a meaningful institutional reform would be the elimination of the culture of patronage and co-option. People should strive for success relying not on state bestowed privileges but on their ability to use opportunities to their advantage through hard work.

The Charter of Democracy could provide the required impetus for the trajectory from the politics of expediency to national interest. It has all the ingredients to unite politicians with a common thread of nation building.

AN AUTOPSY OF PAKISTAN'S INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

Industrial performance is pivotal to ensure sustainable economic growth in the long-run. An engine of any economy, the industry supplies outputs not only to the local but also to foreign markets, which aids in stockpiling reserves to finance the imports of capital goods. Unfortunately, Pakistan has remained an industrially backward country since its creation. One of the largest contributors of jute to the world, Pakistan did not possess a single jute mill. Even today, the sector is heavily textile-reliant, with other key industries being engineering, agro-based, and chemical.

Despite employing roughly one-fifth of the labour-force, Pakistan's manufacturing sector has displayed an appalling show over the years. Perennial reluctance to adopt a state of the art technology and consequent abysmal levels of productivity has been the core issue of our industries. Contrary to countries like India and China, Pakistan has experienced a series of boom-bust cycles due to a lack of industrial output diversity.

Pakistan's governments have paid alarmingly low heed to address the industrial woes. Rarely did they develop viable strategies to incentivise investments in the research and development (R&D), which is why we witness a lack of concentration on the value-added items. This has adversely impacted the nature and quantum of our exports in the wake of sparse exposure to international markets. As a result, the exporters only managed an uninspiring competitive position compared to India, Bangladesh, and Vietnam.

Besides, there is an absence of impetus to invest in the industrial sector. Avenues like real-estate provide lucrative returns comparatively without demanding an exhaustive effort. This has transpired a shift from the industry to real-estate – particularly in plots – in the last decade or two. The most prominent case is that of Karachi, which has an overtly inflated real-estate due to the colossal investment of black money. The land is a haven to park ill-gotten wealth, considering the quality of laws and law enforcement prevailing in the country.

The present government inherited a yawning current account deficit (CAD) along with a deplorable foreign exchange position. This called for unpopular measures to shrink the CAD which the economic team managed by downsizing the imports substantially. However, this facile route is just a temporary fix. Pakistan cannot afford to restrict the imports of machinery and raw materials for an indefinite period, so it must go for a long haul. There has to be a concentrated effort to bolster the limping industrial sector.

A vibrant industry will improve our exports and contribute towards economic growth, which will have a positive trickle-down effect on human development. The government must ease the financing requirements if it wishes to encourage the setting up of an industrial plant. It can promote a research culture with sufficient funds to the relevant entities so that the industry savours the perks of innovation. This will ameliorate the quality and quantity of the goods we produce and make our exports compatible with others.

The incumbents need to prioritise the real economy over real estate. The construction package may boost economic activities, but it does not proffer a long-term solution to the deep-rooted economic imbalances. The renegotiations with the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) have to be accelerated. It should yield a downward revision in energy prices, which the industry badly needs. Pakistan also needs to come up with a robust solution to address the burgeoning circular debt. This has to be supplemented with propitious economic policies like a market-based exchange rate conducive to growth.

The crux of the matter is that a lack of innovation, modest production capacity, and exorbitant energy prices place a conundrum in front of the authorities about how to buttress the stumbling industrial sector. Now is the time to solve the perpetual structural issues to improve the macroeconomic scenario. This will assist in corroborating financial stability and economic prosperity in Pakistan.

. THE LONG WINTER OF UNCONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

A popular belief is that Pakistan is a victim of a leadership vacuum

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Eleven political parties (as the Pakistan Democratic Movement, PDM) are on the rampage to drag Imran Khan's government out because they believe that this government has been "brought" into power. What they mean is that the establishment has stolen elections to put their favourite on the saddle. How much truth does this blame hold?

A popular belief is that Pakistan is a victim of a leadership vacuum, which, as is allegedly believed, goes in the interest of the establishment, which had been happily filling the space, earlier through direct intervention, and now under the new rule of hybrid democracy. Under this methodology, a political party in power is expected to play subservient to the establishment's vision otherwise the light on the exit door turns on. This script has been used so often that almost every move is known and predictable. The question is: why could no political party pass the test of patriotism? Before we attempt to answer these questions, let's see on the other side of the fence.

The truth is that the political parties are equally responsible for this turf war. Never had there been a sincere effort to draw citizens into a consultative process to elevate their core interests and reshape its political leadership. That explains why the elected government had been reluctant to conduct local bodies elections. Even when the elections were held, on the insistence of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the local governments were not given financial independence. For the execution of an act as small as replacing a street light, the councillors had to rush to the DC or his other teammates for approval. The uncontrolled inflation, berated with equal force by everyone, is the product of the deviation from establishing communities at the local level.

Political engineering is not only the forte of the so-called establishment but of every force reluctant to devolve and share power. It is all about power. The one who has power is the one who owns resources and determines the direction in which justice moves. It is here that the rut lies. It is here that things go wrong — badly wrong.

Two major parts of Pakistan — Karachi and Balochistan — both with the potential to turn the fate of the country around have been either turned into warzones or allowed to remain dilapidated. It is absolutely confusing that if progress is the mainstay of those pulling strings then why the MQM had been allowed to render Karachi and by extension the entire Sindh hollow. If improving quality of life necessitates the third force's intrusion then why has Balochistan been left to squander in poverty with no development despite various economic packages announced by almost every new government?

Until recently we were being fed with the 'intervention theory' according to which India was behind all that went wrong in both these regions. Not that it was not true, however, this reality begs the question as to how a state that could bulldoze Indian aggression in Afghanistan and in

AJK, failed in pulling the same punches in its own cities. Fishy as it may sound, smell, and feel, the problem is that we are forced to accept this theory unless we want to be blamed as one of the characters of the theory. The slur of being an agent or a traitor goes like a dagger into the heart, indeed.

Do we have to be in a problem zone forever? Or we can move on, especially now when the political circus is reduced to a bedtime story that can put to sleep even a child.

We have two options to come out of this rut. One is in play right now. Let us take a view of it. We are following the rule of justice framework wherein a dishonest or corrupt leader deserves to go. The supporter of this framework believes that having a righteous leader at the top motivates power wielders at the bottom to behave righteously, and inspires public morality. This theory of divinity incarnate has unfortunately failed. We have been banishing corrupt leaders without creating a just society.

The other option is that of the rule of law framework. The supporters of this theory believe in harnessing the propensity for excesses intrinsic in human nature. They develop laws and constitutions; balance out the power of the executive and legislator with oversight of a powerful judiciary. When everyone in society is held accountable for their actions, it stops the power wielder in their tracks, before they contemplate corruption.

Rule of law is the only way through which the world has seized true democracy and so shall Pakistan. The existing script, promoting arbitrary justice, has worn out — time to revive constitutional democracy to disperse power, so that leaders emerge naturally from within the political system.

THE CENTRALITY OF GEO-ECONOMICS

Sustained economic growth merged with economic integration is the surest path that will uplift Pakistan

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As always, but more so in recent times, geo-economics has acquired great significance due to its vital role in national development and its impact on foreign and security policy. Generally, those national leaders that focused on traditional security and combined it with economic security taking advantage of their country's geographic location were able to give their people a better quality of life and exercise greater level of freedom.

Sustained economic growth merged with economic integration within the country and with its friendly neighbours is the surest path that will uplift Pakistan, contribute toward the well-being of its people, and enhance its defence capabilities. Presently, Pakistan's anaemic economy, dependent on foreign assistance — the IMF, the World Bank and friendly countries — has little space of manoeuvrability in foreign and economic policies and has to operate under a strict financial regime.

In fact, the centrality of Pakistan's relations with China, apart from the strategic dimension and strengthening defence, aims at lifting its economy by placing it on more durable lines. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is largely based on this concept and if faithfully implemented along with other major national pursuits should place the country on an upward trajectory. And give strength, sustenance and durability to the China-Pakistan relationship.

This shows how invaluable is Pakistan's geographic location. But more importantly, are we as a nation truly exploiting the centrality of our geography for economic well-being or are we merely content with what our Chinese allies or others are doing for us or for themselves?

Looking back, history reminds us that we exploited our geography more for global powers than for ourselves. The backlash of policies pursued by the United States during the Afghan jihad on Pakistan was far too severe and hardly compensated by the military and economic assistance that we received from them. With the US, apart from seeking normalisation of relations and cooperation in areas of common interest such as working toward peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan would like to expand and give depth to its economic relationship. Our heavy reliance on leveraging the country's geo-strategic location for others has its limits and overplaying this card becomes counterproductive as history reminds us.

At present the civil war in Afghanistan is a major impediment for Pakistan to fully benefit from intra-regional trade with Central Asian countries. Unfortunately, as the situation stands there are remote chances of any likelihood that the security situation would improve in the near term. The Chinese are, however, expecting to maximise the use of CPEC by using the Gwadar port for shipment of goods and services from western China.

The most striking feature of Washington's policy that affects Pakistan is building India's economic, military and strategic potential against China that could be directed against us. The

US is injecting investments and boosting India's economic growth by supporting its industrial and agricultural production, easing transfer of defense and space technology and providing modern weaponry.

Our political leadership's focus on economic and financial issues is mostly peripheral. It should engage more critically and give economy the importance it deserves if Pakistan is to overcome its perennial dependence. Major thrust of national policy debates should be preferably economy related subjects. In parliament, important economic matters fall prey to political squabbles and only a few parliamentarians have the interest and understanding to engage in these subjects.

While most of the world moves at a fast pace, we take decades to decide the fate of our sick enterprises whether it be the Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) or other state entities. The PSM has remained a victim of state neglect and political gamesmanship costing billions of rupees to the exchequer. And those responsible for placing hurdles in the sale of the Steel Mills with ulterior motives have gone scot free. Hopefully, the great burden of these state industries would end soon with their privatisation.

We have to upgrade our education system and devote greater resources to the health sector for strengthening the economy and increasing national productivity. These measures would also contribute in coping with growing demands of the global economy. Successive governments have failed to give a high priority to these two vital sectors resulting in retarding economic growth and fall in exports. There were hopes attached to the PTI government that they would focus on these areas as PM Imran Khan had repeatedly emphasised their importance before coming to power. Moreover, by adopting a Single National Curriculum (SNC) which appears to be a favourite plan of the government we may be regressing and playing with the destiny of the country rather than moving forward.

The impact of the pandemic on the economy has been severe at the global and national level. This required greater professional expertise in dealing with which we fortunately had to an extent in the person of the Finance Minister and State Bank Governor and a few others. What we need is more officials to be well-versed in financial matters. Inefficient management of national resources and political pressures over extended periods has resulted in the continuous rise of national debt. As of August 2020, the total debt and liabilities of Pakistan was estimated to be Rs44.2 trillion (\$270 billion) which is 106.8% of GDP, much higher than the safe limit of 77% which is the internationally accepted criteria.

The rising Chinese economic power is being thwarted by the US by trying to place several hurdles in its way. But despite that China's economy is moving ahead and was the only major power whose GDP was growing at an appreciable pace. According to experts, government-led investment and demand for Chinese goods globally were the major factors that helped China to boost its exports and revive its economy at a faster rate. This augurs well for Pakistan as it is a major beneficiary of Chinese loans and its aided projects.

A weak economy limits options in foreign and economic policies. Global politics centers largely on the economy and influences relations between countries. It is in Pakistan's vital interest to make the economy the centerpiece of its foreign and national policy.

DIGITISATION AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS GOVERNANCE

Digitisation is clearly one of the greatest tools of competitiveness in today's global environment

Digitisation has been one of the most powerful tools of transforming the functioning of governments and companies in modern times. China, Singapore and South Korea, the most dynamic and progressive economies of Asia, adopted digitisation in all their business activities and official work more than a few decades ago. Of course, the United States, Europe and Japan have all their official data digitised. This has brought about a revolutionary change in their functioning. India too is moving fast on digitisation.

Pakistan's Prime Minister recently remarked that the government would adopt digitisation in all government departments. Chaotic politics and feeble economic conditions have taken the focus away from digitisation. It would demand a high priority if the government is serious in undertaking this effort in the prevailing environment. We are already late, as in everything else, and cannot afford to lose any more time in implementing a comprehensive national digitisation programme.

Moreover, there has to be an awareness in policymaking circles that governance is undergoing a major change as technology takes strides. Companies as well as the government have to adopt definitive measures as they comprehend and put into practice the functions of modern governance.

Although several industries, business concerns and even government departments have transitioned to digitisation, there are many yet that need to change. The effort of the government should be to encourage and facilitate the industrialists, businessmen and government functionaries to undertake digitisation seriously on their own and devise measures in the form of educating or coaxing those to enact this transformation.

The problem in Pakistan, as in many developing countries, is that persons in managerial positions are those who are old-school and uninitiated in these rapid technological changes and hold set ideas. The brighter side is that the younger cadre of officers, businessmen and entrepreneurs are more flexible, adaptive to new ideas and methods of working and accepting of technology and modern techniques of governance more readily. The tide is gradually turning in their favour.

The exponential spread of mobile phones in Pakistan is a classic example and demonstration of how this phenomenon is influencing our lives. The virtual and the real world are blending as the former is extending its spread into the physical.

In Pakistan, industry, businesses and several other fields of activity like education, healthcare, transportation and energy will have to eventually digitise. It is encouraging to note that many educational institutions, hospitals and state and private institutions have digitised their functioning and realise its benefits.

But much more has to be done as many businesses, industrial units and warehouses have reservations due to several reasons. Those who are hesitant to be transparent in their functioning or are too medieval in mindset are avoiding going online.

Interestingly, in the past few decades there has been a phenomenal increase in new technologies, and it is the convergence and blending of these that has given rise to synergies that had a transformational impact on how the world functions. The powerful microcomputers that are a part of every conceivable component or system can record, store and process data that is being used for a wide range of purposes. Computer power continues to grow exponentially helping in broadening and deepening our understanding of the universe. Organisations that leverage the speed of information and smarter technology to report and record important deliberations may soon find themselves doing better and faster than their predecessors. Technological advances in data collection and analytics have resulted in unprecedented amounts of data being available for decision-making. One of the major challenges facing a decision-maker is sifting through this data to optimise their functioning.

Cloud computing is another area from which many of our organisations or individuals are benefiting. The enormous volume of data generated by smart objects and subjects is safely stored by cloud computing.

It is now for us to shape the economic, scientific, political and social changes triggered by digitisation. But the conditions in our country presently seem to resist or are indifferent to any positive change. We are too involved in infighting, and good governance or sound practices are not our priority. Patronage has become a part of our culture and that determines how most of us function and relate to issues. Negativity in politics goes against good governance. Corruption, favouritism and incompetence bred on narrow nationalism or political and personal considerations all act as brakes on sound governance.

Certain government organisations and private enterprises have taken the task of digitisation seriously but many have not given the importance it deserves. Information technology is still considered a new field even though it has been in application for a few decades, and for some, computer science or technology hardly interests them.

For improving governance, it is essential that all related systems should be digitised and upgraded with modern systems and technology. It should also be ensured that these applications are economically viable and technologically feasible. This would greatly enhance the functioning of government departments and private sector enterprises and will be cost-effective in the long term. This would require well thought-out planning and investment and a team of professionals who are tech-savvy and dedicated to the task.

Governance is no more the same as it was in the past. Think for a moment: most of the things we did in the past either in government or business now need a different approach because of the speed and volume of information that keeps pouring in. Whereas digitisation and technological advances have given us enormous advantage and leverage, they have also increased the risks as multiple forces are simultaneously at play.

Digitisation is clearly one of the greatest tools of competitiveness in today's global environment and should be given the importance it deserves at the organisational, institutional and national level. The remarkable spread of technology in every major field has impacted on every aspect of value chain whether it be procurement, production, price structure or human resource. And Pakistan cannot afford to be left behind.

POPULATION GROWTH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Way back in 1798, Thomas Malthus was astonished to see the growing mass of humanity and warned about its consequence. He said, “The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race.”

In a matter of a few years from the writing of these words, the global population hit one billion, which has now reached almost 7.5 billion. Though this exponential growth has not created the situation that Malthus has indicated, it nevertheless has created conditions, such as climate crisis, which has strained the earth’s capacity to generate resources at the optimal level. According to recent research led by the University of Washington and published in *The Lancet*, the earth’s population will peak at 9.6 billion in 2064.

The contribution of Pakistan to this population bulge will be immense, to say the least. As per the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics sixth census report, Pakistan’s population stands at well over 200 million — a 60% rise from the last census that took place in 1998. This almost unchecked population growth is a governance issue because of the strain it lays on resources leaving the government with limited choices to produce quality human beings — a critical area for the development of a country’s economic base.

At 2.4%, Pakistan’s annual population growth rate is higher than many countries. Not surprisingly we have surpassed Brazil as the fifth most populous country in the world.

Though we take pride in the so-called youth bulge that overpopulation has bestowed upon us, the reality is that this demographic change has led to a rise in urban migration. Today more than 20% of Pakistanis live in 10 major cities.

The young people unable to find job opportunities in villages and small towns are forced to move to cities. Had the government planned to create new cities, as is the practice throughout the developing world, we might have had fewer issues as regards to employment opportunities, high inflation, and unplanned urbanisation.

According to some reports, urbanisation in Pakistan is growing at an annual rate of 3%, which is the highest growth rate in South Asia. The United Nations Population Division estimates that “by 2025 nearly half the country’s population will live in urban areas.” Are we aware of the crisis this will generate?

There is a direct correlation between demography and security. Historically, population growth has been one of the destabilising factors in the least developed countries. Young people are usually more susceptible to extreme behaviours. A study conducted by Population Action International shows that about 80% of the world’s civil conflicts since the 1970s have occurred in countries with young, fast-growing populations.

Ideally, we should have used the demographic power to our advantage, but lack of investment in education and the inability of the state to produce economic opportunities through the

development of manufacturing sector, the youth bulge has become a liability, which can be a serious threat to the country's security.

In a turnaround from terrorism, which until a few years back had been bleeding Pakistan to death, a fight is still raging to reduce extremism, especially in the matter of religion, where space for diversity is fast shrinking. But it is not just religious fanaticism that has contributed to making the youth belligerent. Other factors are equally responsible. According to different estimates, almost 32% of our young generation is illiterate while a majority of others are school dropouts. Our enrolment rate is the lowest in South Asia. We spend 2% of GDP on education, while the quality of education has been questionable since ages now. Young people leaving colleges are hard put to face the challenges of the globalised world.

Attention towards this anomaly is also drawn in the State Bank of Pakistan's third quarterly report entitled "The State of Pakistan's Economy — 2019-2020". The report reveals: "When it comes to productivity, the poor state of human capital development is cited as one of the major binding constraints for Pakistan. With education and training on the lower side, the existing and incoming labour force does not have the desired level of capacity to effectively participate in economic activities."

According to the State Bank estimate, 1.8 million people enter the job market annually in Pakistan. For their absorption in the workforce, Pakistan needs an annual economic growth rate of at least 6 to 7%. As of 2018, there were 3.8 million people unemployed in the country. One is sure that in the aftermath of the coronavirus-induced economic shutdown this figure must have multiplied — a scary situation to grapple with. Many a research has identified a direct link between religious extremism and social and economic marginalisation.

This scenario becomes more worrisome when we see the political leadership giving patchy attention to the implications of the population explosion and its fall out. For generations now, almost every government has issued cash-based youth programmes, but none has prioritised the development of small and medium-sized businesses — the real backbone of any country's economic strength.

We can solve this enigma in two ways. First is the traditional method of introducing family planning interventions with a focus to accelerate women's access to contraceptives and to remove societal stigma the right-wing quarters have attached to the topic of birth control. Second is by introducing human development interventions such as: providing every child equal opportunity of getting an education until high school; creating universal health coverage system with a focus on prevention to mitigate environmental hazards; generating employment opportunities through business development; and bringing more women into the workforce. The list goes on. However, these are the bare minimum a country could do to put its growing population to good use. Interestingly, the adoption of the second method would automatically take care of the issue of population growth.

Pakistan is on the verge of meeting developmental indicators of a developed country because of CPEC. All that is needed is a vision that could transform this project into an opportunity and turn this youth bulge from a liability to an asset. Are we ready for the challenge?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND E-COMMERCE

The Covid-19 crisis has brought a change in customer behaviour for more than 65% of companies

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Pakistan's economic progress is directly linked to the participation of its youth in the economic process. For their effective involvement, we will have to take a departure from the routine processes of doing business and present organisations new opportunities based on science and technology. One area to explore in this regard is e-commerce. From the dot-com era to digitalisation, businesses have undergone a complete infrastructural overhaul. During the 90s, the market lacked a secure financial transactional system for online purchases. Only organisations with an appetite to take a risk and tolerant to uncertainty would plunge into this less trodden path. That is no more the case. Today digital solutions are increasingly explored by organisations to compete successfully in the international market.

The Covid-19 crisis has brought a change in customer behaviour for more than 65% of companies. People went online to buy essential products. Sales categories such as groceries, pharmaceuticals, health and hygiene products, restaurant delivery, as well as financial services saw the largest increases in the Covid-19 crisis through both third-party online marketplace and e-commerce. This trend has also caught up in Pakistan and today almost all retailers have switched to online shopping. Those unable to establish an online retail organisation are using Facebook and Instagram to create a market for their products. In short, the prospects of growth through online sales are huge and promising.

The private sector in Pakistan is contributing significantly towards business transformation processes and enhanced readiness of consumers to embrace e-commerce. Though there are countless initiatives on-board today, such as Zameen.com, Daraz.pk and Pakwheels.com, one name that stands out is that of Saqib Azhar. He is running an organisation with the name of Enabler. This venture aims to bring more people into the folds of e-commerce with the purpose to eradicate poverty through job creation. According to Azhar, e-commerce is a prosperity enabler. He facilitates people in two categories. One, he aligns his clients to the e-commerce opportunities in the online marketplace; two, he trains his clients on how to run the online venture to earn a living.

Pakistan faces an acute shortage of skilled labour and there is a dire need to bridge this gap. According to UNICEF's report titled 'Developing Skills in Youth to Succeed in an Evolving South Asian Economy: A case of Pakistan', the labour market of Pakistan is beset with several challenges that have caught it into a skill trap. Employers are forced to settle for the low-skilled workforce because of a strong disconnect between the demand for a specific skill and its supply. To correct the course of Pakistan's economy we have to equip citizens with skills they need to compete in the global market.

In his book, Passive Income, Azhar has given a detailed account of the varying opportunities we have at our disposal to enhance economic development through skill development related to e-

commerce. Recently he met President of Pakistan Arif Alvi and was given assurance of complete government cooperation in his endeavour. However, to make e-commerce successful, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and the labour will have to converge on a single platform. It is about having a common narrative leading to a unified policy on e-commerce. Anything short of that can be perilous to Pakistan's progress in this regard.

Having said that, the question is what steps Pakistan would have to take for the development of e-commerce. One, we have to agree that e-commerce is the new digital solution for business ventures and, therefore, support companies facilitating online transactions like PayPal. Two, we have to remove impediments in the access of internet facility for almost everyone in the country. This would also include enabling a widespread 4-G connectivity. Third, we would have to update our curriculum and include subjects such as marketing, sales, advertising and e-commerce. Historically, the disconnect between skilled labour and entrepreneurs has been identified to the disengagement between industries and academia. Outdated and irrelevant curricula taught in vocational institutes and even in universities have been producing an irrelevant workforce. Therefore, for a healthy economic development it is essential to remove these institutional inefficiencies along with establishing a culture of research and development that supports e-commerce. Fourth, we will have to digitalise our business structure on international standards so that e-commerce becomes a way of doing business rather than an exception.

Having almost assumed the status of a messiah, all our bets are now on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, to bring us the long-cherished economic boost. For a full advantage of this so-called game-changer project, Pakistan cannot rely on a traditional method of doing business. By increasing the uptake of e-commerce and digital solutions, Pakistan can effectively address its widening inequality, reduce cost of doing business and create an enabling environment where a taxation regime facilitates rather than obstructs the system.

PAKISTAN'S U.S.-CHINA BALANCING ACT

As effects of the deteriorating U.S-China relationship begin to loom over South Asia, Pakistan will need to tread carefully. The tense nature of U.S.-China relations and the deepening U.S. strategic partnership with India are likely to put Pakistan in a precarious strategic position. With a new administration coming into office in the United States, the future of U.S.-Pakistan ties will increasingly depend on how the United States carries forward its relations with China and India. Under a Biden administration, Washington is more likely to deal less harshly with Beijing as compared to the Trump administration, however, a drastic change in relations with New Delhi seems unlikely and competition with China is likely to remain for years to come. It is in Islamabad's interests to promote positive ties with both China and the United States, and it will need to adopt a balanced approach to maintain strategic equilibrium with both countries.

However, even if Pakistan would prefer not to take sides in a U.S.-China rivalry, the U.S.-India strategic partnership may force it to do so. Therefore, it is important for Pakistan to continue stressing the consequences of an unconditional U.S-India strategic partnership on regional stability and how this partnership may force Pakistan in difficult and unwanted position.

U.S.-India Cooperation: BECA, LEMOA, and COMCASA

With a new administration coming into office in the United States, the future of U.S.-Pakistan ties will increasingly depend on how the United States carries forward its relations with China and India.

India, it seems, has already made a choice—how far it is ready to go in this relationship, however, remains to be seen. Since 2016, India's growing strategic partnership, under agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the recently signed Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), has demonstrated India's preference to side with the United States. These agreements opened the doors of long-term strategic and military cooperation between the two states to counter the expanding influence of a common and an immediate military threat from China. Additionally, the U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific (declassified in the final days of the Trump administration) also stresses the need to build India's capacity as a Major Defense Partner in South Asia to counterbalance China. However, India still cannot afford to isolate itself from China due to trade dependence with its northern neighbor. Even with the Ladakh conflict unresolved, and despite social media campaigns to boycott Chinese products gaining momentum, China remains India's largest import partner—representing 16 percent of imports. A boycott of Chinese products to replace them with indigenous ones would still hurt the Indian economy, therefore, complete disassociation from China does not appear a viable option for India.

As policymakers in Washington are eager to boost ties with India to counter China, the adverse consequences of the U.S.-India defense partnership may be borne by Pakistan. Chinese military forces are modernizing to compete with the United States. This, in turn, deters India from engaging in a serious military conflict with China. As noted above, New Delhi is also not in a position to burn bridges with China, and thus may seek to avoid a military confrontation. In contrast, the Indian military arsenal could be deployed against Pakistan, and Pakistan is concerned that New Delhi might be more inclined to direct its new arms against Pakistani targets instead of Chinese ones. As Pakistan modernizes and builds up its own arsenal in response to India, this is likely to not only create a security dilemma and regional instability, but also set-off an arms race in the region that can prove to be catastrophic.

Pakistan's foreign policy goals ought to focus on putting forth this critical evolving situation in South Asia before the major world players and on articulating how this might unfold in the future. There is a risk of unintended escalation and inadvertent hostilities with ongoing military support to India by the United States. Pakistan understands, however, that the United States and India strategic partnership holds little hope of a rollback in the immediate future. However, if the United States wishes to play the role of regional stabilizer, as it has in the past, it will need to revisit a relationship that primarily focuses on India as the U.S. partner in South Asia.

Strategic Balancing in Pakistan-China Ties

Nonetheless, Pakistan cannot rely entirely on the United States to provide it with security, especially given the deepening of the U.S.-India strategic partnership. This makes it imperative for Pakistan to maintain close ties with China. Moreover, since Pakistan only has limited access to latest warfare technologies as compared to India, in order to maintain the strategic stability with India, Pakistan needs to acquire emerging defense systems. Pakistan may look to pursue defense cooperation with China, particularly in cyber and space infrastructure due to better prospects of devising sustainable defense solutions in a hybrid war. Defense cooperation with China to close the strategic imbalance gap might fall under domains of autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, air defense systems, and quantum computing.

Besides China's assistance in modernizing the country's military, it has also revived Pakistan's significance by planning to link it to the rest of the world through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan, a developing country ridden with socio-economic problems, cannot forgo the development potential of CPEC. CPEC not only holds economic imperatives for Pakistan but the region as whole. Outright U.S. military, technology, as well as energy support to India is likely to compel Pakistan to deepen its economic ties with China to try to bolster its own economic strength to compete with India. This may impact Pakistan and the U.S relations as it will put the two states into camps of other's opponent, and close doors for areas of potential economic cooperation.

Potential Areas of U.S.-Pakistan Cooperation

Although cooperation with China will elevate Pakistan in the economic and military domains, this does not have to overshadow positive relations with the United States as an old ally. In order to augment U.S.-Pakistan cooperation, both states need to understand the other's national security concerns and adopt a more neutral approach. For instance, Pakistan should refrain from endorsing either China or the United States' position on issues such as Hong Kong or the South China Sea, and similarly, the United States should avoid favoring India or Pakistan in bilateral security issues—as it appeared to do during the Pulwama/Balakot crisis.

Now, in a multipolar world, as the Pakistan-U.S. relationship is increasingly shaped by the roles of China and India, it is not necessary for the two countries to move towards disengagement. The CPEC component of China-Pakistan relations in particular was viewed with suspicion by the Trump administration, as it found faults such as debt trap and the infrastructural development program from a strategic angle. Pakistan can dispel such suspicions in Washington by appointing a non-military person as authority of CPEC project. Meanwhile, the Biden administration should be cautious of falling into rivalry trap with China when it comes to CPEC and stop posing the unreasonable “us” or “them” options for Pakistan. The Pakistan government must allay the doubts of Washington while both sides advance people-to-people relations in areas of education, immigration, and health.

The past two decades of U.S. presence in South Asia have been significant in shaping the region's security dynamics. Now that after 19-years of conflict, warring sides in Afghanistan have finally come to the negotiating table, cooperation between the United States and Pakistan is crucial as both states need a satisfactory solution to end years of turmoil in the region. Pakistan has landed the role of a third key player in the Afghan peace process, highlighting the fact that despite the highs and lows of U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations, Islamabad will always occupy a unique position in Washington's security calculus. Given that Pakistan has improved its shifting relations with the United States through its role in the Afghan peace process, it is now time for the United States to pay attention to potential regional instability that may result from its military support to India.

Now, in a multipolar world, as the Pakistan-U.S. relationship is increasingly shaped by the roles of China and India, it is not necessary for the two countries to move towards disengagement. Disengagement risks damaging U.S. acceptance in Pakistan while pushing Pakistan closer to China unwillingly and ultimately impacting U.S. interests in the region, such as Afghanistan or regional stability.

SIMMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES BETWEEN KASHMIR AND NAGORNO KARABAKH CONFLICT

In the most recent development, following some clashes on the Line of Contact on September 27th, 2020, Azerbaijan mobilized its troops against the Armenian forces in the disputed Karabakh region, with Armenia too responding with a partial mobilization and both the countries declaring martial law. The conflict ultimately ended with a ceasefire agreement signed on November 20th, 2020 in Moscow, Russia with Azerbaijan gaining control of a majority of the disputed region. This prompted some to say that the Nagorno Karabakh dispute is similar to that of Kashmir, and that perhaps Pakistan should take similar steps as Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh and Kashmir dispute are in reality two very different issues having very few similarities. Nagorno-Karabakh is ethnically a majority Christian Armenian region lying between Azerbaijan and Armenia while Kashmir is a majority Muslim region split up between India and Pakistan. The former issue started with the decline of the USSR while the latter began with the end of colonial rule in the Sub-continent. In the first case, Armenian locals with the departure of the USSR initiated an uprising against Azerbaijan for autonomy and association with Armenia; but in the case of Kashmir, Raja Hari Singh signed the instrument of accession with India against the will of the majority Kashmiris.

It is thought that the two issues due to similar contexts can be resolved by holding a UN referendum. But both the cases are treated very differently when it comes to International Law. Firstly, the entire international community including Armenia recognizes the region of Nagorno-Karabakh as an Azeri territory, with several resolutions from UNSC demanding the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the region. But the Kashmir region is recognized as a disputed territory between India and Pakistan by the UN. According to resolution no. 47 of UNSC, “the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite” has to be used in Kashmir for providing right of self-determination to Kashmiris.

Secondly, Azerbaijan has a right to exercise its territorial jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh under International law and can take this issue to ICJ with a much stronger position. But India cannot justify atrocities and demographic changes done by it recently through abrogating article 370 and 35(A). From Article 47 of the Geneva Convention IV, an occupying power (India) has no right to annex the territory and has to keep the territorial boundaries and institution of the region intact, before holding a plebiscite under UN resolution of 1948.

In the light of the above stated arguments it is concluded that the Nagorno Karabakh dispute is very different to the Kashmir issue, with regards to history, demography and geo-strategic

realities of these regions. The recognition of territorial sovereignty of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh region by the United Nations and the international community makes it very different to the Kashmir issue. Other than that, the fact that both India and Pakistan are nuclear armed countries makes the potential global implications of a war over Kashmir much larger than that of the Nagorno Karabakh dispute. Therefore it is totally unfair to claim that the two issues are similar and have similar implications.

PAKISTAN 2020: YEAR IN REVIEW

The outbreak of COVID-19 made 2020 a tough year for governments around the world. Internal political strife, rising religious extremism, poor socioeconomic growth, and disordered policymaking made it even tougher for Pakistan. At the diplomatic front, Pakistan's foreign policy goals of having more influence on its western border, receiving praise for its role in Afghanistan, improving ties with the United States, and keeping a neutral position in both Iran-Saudi rivalry and the U.S.-China contest have largely been met. However, with the stalemate in the Afghan peace process, a new administration in the United States, and the likely escalation of conflicts in the Middle East and Asia, Pakistan will need to be particularly cautious in its foreign policy approach in 2021. Moreover, Pakistan has not received much success in strengthening its diplomatic position vis-à-vis India and, despite a robust campaign, has not won the support of the international community on the Kashmir dispute. To address these external challenges, Pakistani policymakers have to look inward, where its major weaknesses lie.

The Internal Fault Lines

COVID-19 dominated Pakistan's policy concerns in 2020—Pakistan was among the first few countries to report positive cases of the viral infection. As the cases started increasing, the Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government was intensely criticized for its inability to devise a coherent policy. The health crisis also illustrated the policy divide between federal and provincial governments. Particularly in Sindh, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) pushed for stricter lockdown policies while the PTI, hesitant of the potential economic impact, condemned the lockdown. Eventually, all provincial governments consensually agreed to implement Khan's policy of a "smart lockdown" and, from May onwards, started gradually lifting lockdown restrictions. Mysteriously, a month after lifting the lockdown, the number of cases started declining. The government believed its smart lockdown policy, which pushed for strict adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) instead of a nation-wide lockdown, flattened the curve. However, as the public rarely followed SOPs, it remains unclear as to how Pakistan was able to counter the first wave of COVID-19.

Now, as the second wave of COVID-19 hits Pakistan, the launch of the opposition-led Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to oust Imran Khan's government has not only fueled political instability but has also become a threat to the wellbeing of the nation's citizens. Meanwhile, the economy is experiencing a constant decline owing to this instability and health crisis. The economic impact of growing socio-political instability is concerning; falling GDP growth, rising consumer prices, and the sharpening depreciation of currency illustrate the need for political unity in the country.

When it comes to national security, terrorist attacks have considerably declined in the last few years. Yet, several bomb blasts in Balochistan, an attack on an opposition party's rally in Karachi, and an attempted attack on the Karachi Stock Exchange this year have revived concerns over the continued presence of terrorist outfits in the country. Such terrorist activities could pose problems for Pakistan in the future as, despite taking some measures against money laundering and terrorism financing, there is still a lot left to be done to remove Pakistan's name from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list.

The rise of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, an extreme right-wing political party that enjoys significant support from the masses, poses a serious challenge to both political stability and the internal security of Pakistan.

Notably, the extremist ideologies that fuel terrorist attacks surged this year. In September, mainstream Sunni religious parties like Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam held a rally in front of the parliament house in Islamabad, raising slogans of sectarian hate speech. There has been an increase in the number of judicial cases of blasphemy and extrajudicial killings motivated by blasphemy. The rise of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, an extreme right-wing political party that enjoys significant support from the masses, poses a serious challenge to both political stability and the internal security of Pakistan.

The External Challenges

In contrast to its domestic policy, Pakistan's foreign policy in 2020 was more coherent, mainly due to its improved civil-military relationship under the Imran Khan-led government. Specifically, Pakistan was able to secure its foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan and obtain a prominent role in the region by using its influence over the Taliban to facilitate the U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha and to provide support for the intra-Afghan dialogue. Throughout the year, key representatives from the Afghan government, including Afghan Peace Envoy Abdullah Abdullah and Gulbadeen Hekmatyar, as well as Zalmay Khalilzad – the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan – made several important visits to Pakistan. The Taliban also had an official meeting in Islamabad just before the onset of the intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha. Having both political and economic stakes in fostering peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan's current strategy seems to be to establish a new coalition government in Kabul with the Taliban having a significant share in power. Hence, Pakistani policymakers are apprehensive about the current stalemate in the dialogue process reflected in Imran Khan's speech on his first official visit to Kabul—he explicitly supported a ceasefire between the two Afghan parties and urged to “do everything, whatever is possible” to establish peace in Afghanistan.

The diplomatic success in Afghanistan aided in improving U.S.-Pakistan relations. However, as the United States gradually withdraws its troops from Afghanistan and diverts its focus to its power competition with China, the principle driver in the Pakistan-U.S. relationship is not Afghanistan but Pakistan's growing economic, security, and political ties with China. While the United States remains one of its top trading partners, Pakistan views Chinese investment under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as pivotal to its economic growth. Indo-centric security concerns of Pakistan also influence the Pakistan-China military relation, a domain in which the United States cannot do much for Pakistan. For now, as contended by the Prime Minister, Pakistan is seeking to maintain a neutral position between the two global powers. This balancing act could give Pakistan a unique status in South Asia—it can regain its role as a facilitator of back-channel communication between China and the U.S.

In the Middle East, Pakistan has been using a similar balancing strategy between Iran and Saudi Arabia for the past several years. 2020 marked a challenging year for Pakistan's neutrality, as the year began with the assassination of Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani. Saudi Arabia pushed Pakistan to declare a stronger position against Iran, but Pakistan tried to maintain neutrality by offering to mediate. The objective was simple: convincing both countries that Pakistan's diplomatic relations with the other could serve their interest in the future, if and when they seek a negotiated settlement to their dispute. However, such a strategy would not work in the Middle East unless both countries desire peace in the region.

Another blow to Pakistan-Saudi Arabia ties was Saudi Arabia's refusal to grant Pakistan's request for a special meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Kashmir. The relationship suffered significantly, as Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi issued a critical statement on OIC's inaction on the Kashmir issue. However, most analysts agreed that Pakistan would continue to seek economic support from Riyadh, even if it fails to get much political support. Hence, with the possible escalation of conflict in the Middle East, Pakistan needs a holistic strategy that reduces economic reliance on one bloc. To that end, Pakistan must deal with internal issues of economic mismanagement and sectarianism to develop an independent foreign policy based on national interests.

While Pakistan achieved some key foreign policy goals on the diplomatic front in 2020, next year is likely to pose more challenges for the country.

On the eastern border of Pakistan, the situation remained volatile in 2020 after the Balakot strike last year, with a recorded rise in ceasefire violations. Meanwhile, as tensions rose along the India-China border in June, Pakistan used this to highlight Indian actions in Kashmir and its

stance on the disputed status of Kashmir. In addition to a robust diplomatic campaign against Indian policies in Kashmir, Pakistan has possibly revamped its efforts in supporting the Kashmir insurgency, as is evident from the intensification of violence in the Kashmir valley. In the long-run, this strategy could re-escalate Indo-Pakistan tensions—a risk Islamabad is taking to discredit Indian claims over Kashmir. A better strategy would be to improve Pakistan’s image in the world through strengthening democratic and liberal institutions in the country and using diplomatic, rather than military, channels to resolve issues with India. The COVID-19 pandemic and the revival of SAARC temporarily halted escalation between India and Pakistan and increased the likelihood of regional cooperation. However, this was a temporary solution to a volatile bilateral relation—the two countries need more than a humanitarian health crisis to bring peace in South Asia.

A Challenging Year Ahead

While Pakistan achieved some key foreign policy goals on the diplomatic front in 2020, next year is likely to pose more challenges for the country. Pakistan’s significance in Afghanistan hinges on the success of the intra-Afghan dialogue and its relationship with the United States may suffer due to its ties with China. Hostile relations with India are likely to aggravate as chances of bilateral talks decline. Pakistan’s neutral position in the Middle East might also worsen with the possible spike in the Iran-Saudi conflict as Pakistan seeks improved ties with Saudi Arabia. The main challenges in the year ahead, however, stem from inside the country where growing political instability, religious extremism, and economic crises are continuously demonstrating the inefficiency of the federal government and limiting the country’s foreign policy choices to ones that prevent further destabilization of its internal economic and security situations.

HOW BIDEN'S WIN IS LIKELY TO AFFECT U.S.-PAKISTAN TIES

Democrats in the United States are celebrating a Biden victory, ecstatic over the ousting of Trump and the end of what they consider a long, painful chapter in U.S. politics. For the rest of the world, a change of guard has separate implications.

Several other countries, weary of U.S. exceptionalism, may have preferred Trump stay in power, as they saw his foreign policy as contributing to China emerging as a **new economic epicenter**. Many in Pakistan also saw him as a leader unworthy of respect and were baffled by his public support in the United States.

President-elect Joe Biden's approach to each of Pakistan's four neighbors—China, India, Afghanistan, and Iran—will collectively determine the state of the U.S.-Pakistan relations.

Implications of U.S.-India relations for Pakistan

It is possible that a Vice President-elect of Indian origin in the White House will further strengthen U.S.-India ties. Yet wholly different factors contributed to U.S.-India ties reaching a zenith these past five years. In the strategic arena, we have seen the United States partner with India as part of its regional strategy to counter China's ever-expanding economic influence. A day before the U.S. elections, the United States and India signed a key military deal, further signifying strengthening ties.

This has turned India's non-alignment foreign policy on its head, as closer ties with the United States suggest greater allyship. Under Biden, it is likely that the United States will revert to using its role in multilateral institutions to pose as a global human rights champion. As part of this, it might indirectly **call out** India on its alleged human rights violations in Kashmir. This is unlikely to change the overall nature of U.S.-India ties.

As India is Pakistan's oldest rival, a close bond between the United States and India is less than desirable for Pakistan, which has been engaged in strategic communication to counter India's narrative on Pakistan and Kashmir. This will only make Pakistan's task more difficult, especially with multilateral organizations such as the IMF, the support of which it desperately needs.

Pakistan and U.S.-China relations

Importantly, both India and Pakistan share a border with China to the north. The neo-cold war between China and the United States has been the global political focal point over the last few years. Pakistan is the recipient of billions in loans and aid from the Chinese under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), ostensibly allowing for accelerated growth, infrastructure development, and job creation—the two often refer to one another as “**Iron Brothers**” under their all-weather strategic partnership framework.

As India is Pakistan's oldest rival, a close bond between the United States and India is less than desirable for Pakistan, which has been engaged in strategic communication to counter India's narrative on Pakistan and Kashmir.

Naturally, a tougher U.S. policy on China will have ramifications for Pakistan. The brewing trade war is already having ripple effects across the world, and with China emerging through the global pandemic as the biggest economy in the world and the only one projected to show moderate growth, the United States will be keen to stem this flow. The U.S.-India partnership makes more sense in this context, as a stronger, more economically sound India will offset the global shadow cast by Chinese hegemony.

Pakistan's role in U.S.-Afghanistan negotiations

Biden will be the fourth U.S. president to face the 19-year-old—some argue 41-year-old—Afghan crisis. The removal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan has been on the cards since the start of the war. While their presence has **gradually reduced**, and the focus has shifted from national security to strategic asset protection and safeguarding, roughly 4,500 U.S. troops still remain in the country.

The February U.S. Taliban peace deal paved the way for the final troop removal, especially in the presence of a potential deal through Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN). Without an IAN deal, a U.S. troop pullout will result in a power vacuum. It is possible that in the last few days of his presidency, Trump will try to deliver on his key campaign promise of removing the troops.

It is unlikely that Biden would act differently, having **expressed** his views to end “forever wars” (he was also a noted war skeptic as part of the Obama administration). As it stands, the troop presence is expected to be nearly halved by January 2021.

Afghanistan plunging into chaos is less than ideal for Pakistan, which enjoyed closer ties with the United States in the last two years of the Trump presidency since it helped bring the Taliban to the table for the U.S.-Taliban talks. Pakistan was termed a key actor in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan under Obama, which will continue in all likelihood under Biden. Pakistan is keen to see reconciliation in Afghanistan, a **promise reiterated** by Prime Minister Imran Khan's maiden trip to Kabul on November 19, as Pakistan already faces a hostile neighbor along its eastern border

The bigger problem is India's role in the Afghan peace process, which was previously marginal at best. However, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar was present at the opening ceremony of the peace talks in September, indicating an expanding circle of influence. Pakistan considers this unfavorable. The Pakistan-U.S. relationship is complex enough under the China equation, but should Biden want India to play a bigger role in Afghanistan, it will ring alarm bells in Pakistan's upper echelons of power.

Afghanistan plunging into chaos is less than ideal for Pakistan, which enjoyed closer ties with the United States in the last two years of the Trump presidency since it helped bring the Taliban to the table for the U.S.-Taliban talks.

If the United States' focus on the western border diminishes, its only interest in the region would be countering China and elevating India, which will be an undesirable outcome for Pakistan. Pakistan would rather that the U.S. troop presence be responsibly maintained in Afghanistan until the negotiations are successful and a power-sharing formula between Kabul and the Taliban is enacted.

Pakistan and U.S.-Iran tensions

Pakistan's western neighbor Iran also presents complications for the United States. The American stance on Iran is not monolithic, as we have seen under the **Obama and Trump** leadership. Biden will likely want to revert to Obama's policy on Iran, but Trump could complicate matters in the last few days of his presidency. On November 16, Trump asked to look into the possibility of **strategic strikes on Iran** to deter its alleged nuclear program, thereby jeopardizing reconciliation under Biden.

Pakistan and Iran share a complicated yet amicable history—divergences in recent years have primarily been rooted in security concerns. An armed conflict between the United States and another one of Pakistan's neighbors is against its interests. Pakistan would be keen to play a part in avoiding such an outcome.

Conclusion

Pakistan has to patiently wait and see what Biden has in store for its neighbors, as the new administration's stance will not be monumentally different towards Pakistan. Previously, in Pakistani strategic thinking, the United States has oscillated between being an "**important strategic partner**" and a "**terror sponsor**," depending on the situation, administration, perceived utility, year, and geopolitical considerations.

Pakistan needs to play a demonstrably positive role in Afghanistan to shed decades of vitriol, ensure security in the region, focus on economic growth, and avoid direct commentary on the U.S.-China trade war. Efforts should also be made to thaw relations with India to move towards regional economic connectivity.

In the short term, little is likely to change for Pakistan, but peace (or lack thereof) in Afghanistan and a dramatic improvement in U.S.-India relations will determine its course of action in the long term.

CORONA VIRUS : SHAPPING THE CONTOURS OF MODERN WORLD

Globalization vs. Protectionism:

Globalization means the movement of ideas, products, technology, and people across borders and different cultures. It is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It has social, cultural, economic, political and legal aspects. Globalization has made the world a global village and talks about co-operation and interdependence. Protectionism, on the other hand, is the restriction of movement of goods and products across borders to protect the national industries and economy. The major goal of protectionism is to boost up national economy, but protectionist measures can also be applied for security purposes. So, we can say that protectionists are basically anti-globalists and prefer domestic strength as compared to foreign co-operation.

Protectionism and Covid-19

Globalization has made the world so interdependent and interconnected that any economic or political change in one state creates a domino effect and influence many other states. For the pandemic, most states were initially blaming China, but as it slowly healed and the pandemic caused more devastating impacts in the western states, more fingers are pointing towards globalization. Multiple narratives are building regarding globalization where protectionists finally got a chance to prove how right they were all along.

Globalization not only played a vital role in the spread of this epidemic, it also made the economic crisis go global by affecting the supply chains. An epidemic that affected a single city in Dec, 2019, grew to become a pandemic affecting almost every state in the world through movement of people and goods. States that adopted strict measures and restricted the movement of people, have relatively less cases of corona virus as compared to other states. The worst impacts of corona virus so far can be seen in USA where New York City was initially the epicenter.

New York City is definitely one of the most crowded cities in the world where daily, thousands of people move in and out for various purposes. This could be one of the reasons of such devastating impacts of corona in NYC because the free circulation of people and goods allowed the virus to spread exponentially. On the other hand, if we talk about African continent, where most states are under developed, and the movement of people in and out of the continent is very less as compared to Europe and Americas, reported cases of corona virus are very low. As of Sep 11, 2020, in the whole continent, the highest number of corona cases is in South Africa, with a count of 642k as compared to USA's count of 6.49m. This provides evidence that movement of people played a vital role in the spread of this virus and movement of people has increased a lot since the rise of globalization.

Critiques of globalization also argue that globalization is to be blamed for an epidemic that spread across borders and will soon plunge the whole world into recession. Interdependence because of globalization has made the world more vulnerable to such situations. For instance, China is one of the biggest markets in the world that exports antibiotics and telecommunications and remains an important part of most of the global supply chains. Half of the world's surgical masks were made by China, even before pandemic. So, when the pandemic struck Wuhan, China, the supplies from China to the rest of the world affected many states that were dependent on China, and they ran out of important pharmaceutical inputs. Even the developed states like

France ran out of medical masks and had to suffer because of lack of important medical equipment. This reveals the cost of such deeply interconnected global supply chains that create a domino effect.

Is Globalization ending?

Globalization has made the world a global village and undoubtedly facilitated the free movement of people, goods, ideas, cultures, information, and technology across borders. But on the other hand, it has also played a major role in the spread of diseases and has made states vulnerable to unexpected shocks. Globalists also believe that the medical or health consequences of corona would prove less destructive if states work together instead of working separately for the vaccine, as a competition. Adopting the nationalist or isolationist approach during the pandemic would crash the international economy and further increase the tensions. As the protectionists suggest, if we'd continue to protect only our national economies and keep on putting barriers on international trade, the national recession would soon turn into a global depression, as happened in 1930's. Timely economic recovery is only possible through global cooperation.

I think that the threat of Covid-19 has created an extraordinary situation. Originating from Asia, and then causing millions of deaths all around the globe, the blame on globalization is legitimate. Most of the states in the world rely on their tourism revenue that has been affected badly due to corona virus. For instance, Saudi Authorities decided to cancel Hajj because of growing pandemic, and the impact on KSA's economy would be dramatic. Similarly, Japan is one of the states that depend highly on tourism revenue from Chinese tourists and travel restrictions have caused severe losses. We have also seen how the supply chains are affected just because one of the major producers (China) was badly hit by the virus. Globalization seems to have conquered the world so there is no way that it can be avoided completely. However, after the pandemic, there might be a little change in the world order regarding high interdependency. States that were mostly dependent on China for their important supplies might try to produce the supplies on their own and prioritize their domestic industries over foreign industries because of the consequences they had to bear during the pandemic. Similarly, travel bans will surely be removed but people might hesitate to cross borders and move freely because there will be awareness regarding the risks related to free movement. So, I think that the pandemic has highlighted some backlashes in globalization, but it doesn't mean that globalization has failed. We can say that it is fragile, despite or even because of its benefits.

INDIA-PAKISTAN NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

Strategic culture of South Asia is comprised of hostility between India and Pakistan. Conventional war, territorial issues, arms race, rising insecurities eventually led to the acquisition of nuclear weapons. India and Pakistan became nuclear weapons states in mid-1998. A debate emerged at international level about the nuclear doctrine for the region. Nuclear doctrine is “the set of principles or rules governing the employment of a capability”. The basic use of this concept is primarily in political, military and strategic sides. If we see doctrine specifically in military terms it contains those rules and principles in which military forces maneuver. In nuclear doctrine states mainly address two main objectives: first management of the nuclear weapons and second operational positioning. To avoid all types of issues related to nuclear weapons states need to develop rules and principles to determine in which conditions these weapons will be used. Nuclear doctrine is an important piece of paper for policy maker in war-like situation or in unstable situation. There are mainly two types of nuclear doctrine: offensive and defensive.

India and Pakistan both states are nuclear weapon states and play a significant role in peace of South Asia. India developed its nuclear weapon in 1974 and named it as peaceful nuclear explosion. Nuclear doctrine was drafted in 1999 by National Security Advisory Board but that was never approved. In 2003 Indian government spelled out its nuclear doctrine. India opted NFU and declared its nuclear weapon program as only for deterrence purposes. NFU but retaliation is a must in response to an attack on India and Indian forces anywhere. Credible minimum deterrence is there to attack aggressor with punitive retaliation with nuclear weapons. No weapons against non-nuclear weapons states or not align with nuclear power. India will retain the option of using nuclear weapons in response to any attack of chemical and biological weapons. Using of nuclear weapons against any aggressor will be in hands of elected people .e.g. Prime Minister. Lastly India will promote nuclear free world without any discrimination.

So every nuclear or conventional doctrine has some controversies which are difficult to explain and implement. No first use is the most controversial part of Indian nuclear doctrine. Indian NFU is conditional and number of times its officials declared that they will reverse it as per the condition. It clearly means that their No First Use posture is not credible enough with regard to their adversaries. Numerous strategists and Indian officials brought Indian NFU in spotlight to evaluate its credibility. Some of them are entirely against this posture. Indian defence minister said that India should not bind itself with No First Use and say that India will react responsibly. There were number of calls during past year to revise the No First Use posture. Bharatiya Janata Party included this in its election manifesto but because of public pressure they later declared that there wouldn't be any reversal in nuclear doctrine. It's important to know what are the pros and cons of NFU to evaluate why NFU is so much controversial in Indian case. Those who are in favor of NFU claim that it will represent India as responsible nuclear weapon states. As late K. Subrahmanyam pointed out, as far as deterrence is concerned perception matters instead of number. So having NFU as nuclear doctrine wouldn't matter. On the other side those who are

against NFU claim that NFU is “not so much a strategic choice, but a cultural one”. They claim that if India found advantage in attacking first in any crisis, it will bring serious consequences as having No first Use posture. Bharat Karnad says that NFU is for peace time and it is not suitable for India.

Another point which is a question over Credible Minimum Deterrence, India is spending huge amount of money on military modernization and initiating arms race in the Region and at the same time they claim that they have credible minimum deterrence posture. Number of Indian strategist says that Indian Nuclear doctrine lack clarity which can lead to any situation in future.

Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons for security purposes to create a strong deterrence against India. Initially Pakistan was stick to peaceful use of nuclear technology but Indian certain actions over time provoked Pakistan to go nuclear. So Pakistan did managed to get nuclear capability. Later these elements became the foundation of Pakistan Nuclear doctrine. Pakistan nuclear posture is truly Indian centric. Pakistan has no official nuclear doctrine but official statements from military and political leadership clearly define the agendas which are part of Pakistan nuclear policy. There are some salient elements in Pakistani nuclear doctrine first nuclear weapons are for national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Main purpose of Pakistani nuclear weapons are to counter Indian aggression. Pakistan nuclear doctrine is consist of few main elements, first Pakistan will maintain Credible Minimum Deterrence, Secondly Pakistan will avoid any type of strategic arms race with India. Thirdly Pakistan will stop testing but it is subjected to Indian actions. Pakistani command and control structure is part of it as well. Lastly Pakistan doesn't have No first Use policy. Pakistan put certain conditions for using nuclear weapons first.

As Pakistani nuclear capability is Indian centric so Indian further actions provoked Pakistan to bring some sort of change to counter Indian hostile and belligerent policies. Pakistan moved from Credible Minimum Deterrence to Full Spectrum Deterrence. India is modernizing its conventional forces. Developing Cold Start Doctrine type of policies which is a huge threat to stability of south Asia. So Pakistan is taking certain actions to balance Indian actions.

Pakistani Nuclear doctrine which is ambiguous and unwritten and there is only one source of information which is official statements. Inside Pakistan there is no clash over Pakistan nuclear policy. Both Military and political leadership are on the same page. Nuclear doctrines mainly serve two purposes first it play a great role of signaling to your adversary intentionally or unintentionally. Second it clarify the role of Nuclear weapons and identify the threshold. Nuclear weapons states adopted mix sort of approach, few have declared nuclear doctrine and few remained ambiguous and Pakistan is one of them.

Having an explicit nuclear doctrine can benefit a state because it clearly indicate threshold. Ambiguous and unwritten nuclear doctrine can be harmful in case your adversary imagined the threshold very low and took certain action which is intolerable. Secondly clear nuclear doctrine will help the states to gain the support of International community not only in peacetime but in crisis time as well. So in my opinion if Pakistan declare its nuclear doctrine it would help Pakistan to gain the status of responsible nuclear weapon state and it will stop India taking further actions like Balakot and claiming false surgical strikes. As Pakistani nuclear program and doctrine is Indian centric, so the threat perception remained in India. Pakistani included no to arms race in its unofficial doctrine but on the other hand Indian military modernization is pushing Pakistan to increase its capabilities and declare its involvement in arms race as well.

Pakistan kept the option of first use as it didn't deny it as such. But the problem lies with practicality of this concept. First use require high degree of military intelligence, early warning system and high degree of proficiency. All these concepts are debatable in context of Pakistan.

Lastly Pakistan Full Spectrum Deterrence is more or less related to NATO's Flexible response and to keep that intact, continues up gradation in military strategy and weapons is necessary. Current economic situation and after effects of COVID-19 would create serious challenges for Pakistan to maintain FSD in future.

Both states are nuclear weapon states and play a crucial role maintaining peace in South Asia. India had declared its nuclear doctrine but Pakistan remained it ambiguous by not declaring it officially. Both have some sort of controversies in their nuclear doctrine which can lead to any misadventure

INDO-PACIFIC REGION : A HOTSPOT OF GREAT RIVALRIES

The Pacific region in post-Cold-War period is fast changing its strategic complexion. This region had been under United States' influence. But, the USA and its proxies like India Taiwan, and some other countries perceive that the region is in a state of flux. USA and its allies fear China may in future challenge USA's undisputed dominance of the seas-lanes in the region.

CHINA'S DISPUTES

China has maritime disputes over some islands in the region (Japan, Vietnam, Brunei, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines). In East China Sea, there is dispute between China and Japan over islands of Diaoyu and Senkakus islands.

The USA assures China's rivals that USA would be their 'security provider' in moment of need. The major stakeholders in the region are the USA, China, Australia, ASEAN countries, Japan and South Korea. American presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama visited the region to strengthen partnership with littoral states.

The Indo-Pacific region is of great importance because of its impact on energy maritime and trade security. ASEAN and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation are important politico-economic players in the region. The APEC members account for 40 per cent of world's population, 54 per cent of the World's Gross Domestic Product and 44 per cent of the World's trade. The ASEAN accounts for about 8.8 per cent of World's population and three per cent of the total area of Earth.

To block China's ascendancy, all littoral states including Japan, Australia, Taiwan, South Korea and other middle ranking regional powers are modernizing their navies. China wants to surpass the USA not only in terms of GDP but also in respect of naval power.

INDIA: EMERGING US PROXY IN INDIAN OCEAN

Robert Kaplan, in his book, Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and Future of American Power, argues that the geopolitics of the twenty-first century will hinge on the Indian Ocean. USA's new protégé is India. To woo India firmly into its fold, USA offered to sell India US\$ 3 billion (per one unit) Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and Patriot Advance Capability (PAC-3) missile defence systems as an alternative to Russian S-400 system. India ditched Russia from whom it had decided to purchase five S-400s Russian S-400s air defence systems at cost of US\$5.4 billion.

With US tacit support, India is getting tougher with China. There was a 73-day standoff on the Doklam (Donglang in Chinese) plateau near the Nathula Pass on Sikkim border last year. Being at a disadvantage vis-a-vis India, China was compelled to resolve the stand-off through negotiations. In later period, China developed high-altitude "electromagnetic catapult" rockets for its artillery units to liquidate Indian advantage there, as also in Tibet Autonomous Region. China intends to mount a magnetically-propelled high-velocity rail-gun on its 10,000-ton-class missile destroyer 055 being built.

China wants to bridge its aircraft-carrier deficiency through anti-ship ballistic missiles and Xian H-6K bomber armed with advanced air launched cruise missiles. Chinese defence systems include DF-, Dong-Feng 21 (DF-21; NATO reporting name CSS-5 – Dong-Feng (literally: ‘East Wind’)). Dong-Feng 21 is a two-stage, solid-fuel rocket, single-warhead medium-range ballistic missile developed by China Changfeng Mechanics and Electronics Technology Academy. A variant is DF-26 with range increased to 3,000 km (1,900 mi) to 4,000 km (2,500 miles). China has two supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, the YJ-12, with a range of 400 km, and the YJ-18, which can hit targets up to 540 km away. But they are no match for US subsonic

Harpoon anti-ship missile, which has been modified to give it a maximum range of about 240 km. An anti-ship variant of US Raytheon’s Tomahawk land attack cruise missile, with a range of over 1,600 km, has been delivered to the US navy.

At us prodding, India revised its maritime strategy “Freedom to Use the Seas’ in 2015 to “Ensuring Secure Seas”. India obtained access to the US naval base in Diego Garcia, and to the French naval bases in Mayotte and Reunion islands, besides Australian naval base in Cocos (Keeling). It signed an agreement with Seychelles to develop and manage facilities on its Assumption Island, another agreement with Mauritius to develop dual- use logistics facilities in the Agalega Island, obtained berthing rights in Duqm Port in Oman and Maputo in Mozambique. Besides, she took up development of the Sittwe Port in Myanmar as part of the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project for building a multi-modal sea, river and road transport corridor for shipment of cargo from the eastern ports of India to Myanmar through Sittwe. It upgraded its existing listening post in northern Madagascar.

Chinese navy’s snooping in Indian Ocean is rising (Deccan Herald, March 3, 2019). Upon Indian navy’s protest, Chinese flotilla had to move away from Port Blair. Till 2025, China, currently in grip of corona virus, Bangkok unrest and Xinxiang Uighur, has to do a lot to end American one-upmanship.

CHINA’S THINKING

China is suspicious of India’s role as a US proxy in the Indo-Pacific region. It regards the arc from The Bay of Bengal to East China Sea as a hot-spot of rivalry. China’s blue Book warns if India China itself and the USA failed to engage with each other more constructively in view of their overlapping interest, the Indian Ocean could end up ‘as an Ocean of conflict and trouble’. Chinese Battle Group and submarine often moved in Indian Ocean though after giving prior movement-notice to littoral states.

China has deployed ‘Xia’ class nuclear submarines with SLBMs in South China Sea. They can reach south-western quadrant of the Indian Ocean via Strait of Malacca or Sunda in a short time.

China is building energy relationship worldwide especially in Central Asia, Russia, Africa, Middle East and Gulf countries.

China gets about 70 per cent of its oil imports from West Asia and Africa through tankers. China is creating a strategic petroleum reserve and is building a fleet of super-tankers for transport of energy to China.

CHINA'S 'STRING OF PEARLS'

The USA has over 800 naval bases while China has only two that is Mombasa and Djibouti, aside from controversial Hambantota (Sri Lanka). Yet, the US propaganda is that China is setting up bases along the sea lanes from Middle East to South China Sea. The bases have dual objectives to protect energy and strategic interests.

USA'S RING

Doubtless the USA is the dominant super-power in the Indo-Pacific region. Majority of the littoral states including India, Australia, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea are under American influence.

The USA has powerful naval bases at Diego Garcia, Busen, Guyan Island, Yongson base (South Korea) and Okinawa (Japan). The USA has stationed its littoral combat ships at Singapore besides accessing facilities of Vietnamese port Cam Rank Bay.

INDIA'S OUTREACH

The revised Indian Maritime doctrine 2009 states that India wants to build a Blue Water Navy capable of defending not only its homeland, but also wider security and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. In view of South East Asia and South China Sea region, India created regional Andaman and Nicobar Tri-Service Command in 2001 at Port Blair.

India's Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited has oil fields in Russia's Sakhalin region. Vietnam allotted two more gas exploration blocks to ONGC-VL during Indian president Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Vietnam in September 2014.

Indian navy wants to attain underwater nuclear power projection capability by year 2025. By said year, Indian navy will have network-centric approach and land-attack assistance capability. The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System has become operational since 2016. It will provide positional information of about 1500 kilometers around the Indian mainland.

India is already a partner in the US Security architecture of Indo-Pacific Region. Indian navy's new acquisition project in the pipeline adds up to well over Rs. 300000 crore over the next 15 years.

Conclusion: Despite adverse advisory opinion on Chagos Island, including Diego Garcia atoll, by International Court of Justice, United States' forces are still entrenched there. Besides, France maintains naval bases in the Indian Ocean and stations frigates off its Reunion islands. China has a string of naval assets in the region from Gwadar to Djibouti.

India's ambition to dominate the Indian Ocean does not augur well for the region. It should let Indian Ocean remain the zone of peace.

PAKISTAN'S KASHMIR CHALLENGE

By the time a Kashmiri child born today in Srinagar turns five years old, he will be part of a Hindu majority Jammu & Kashmir. The domicile law announced by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs has started issuing permanent residency to Indian citizens, completing its agenda of settling the Kashmir issue once and for all by bringing about demographic change in the Valley. **India is buying time.** Once the Hindu settlements are complete in J&K, the UNSC Resolutions will no longer carry weight and their applicability in letter and spirit will also not be possible..

It should worry Pakistan. If Pakistan does not do anything to make India reverse Aug 5th decision and restore the disputed status of J&K rendering this domicile law null and void, then five years from now, there will be no Muslim-majority Kashmir left to raise voice for. The eight million Kashmiri Muslims in IIOJK, for whom we want the international community to stand with us in rebuking Moditva, will no longer need Pakistan to fight for their freedom in an altered reality which favors India.

It should worry the Kashmiris. Five years from now, 'Kashmiriyat' will dilute. Freedom will no longer be a commodity to fight for. The lynchings, the humiliation and the dehumanization of the Indian Muslims that the world is witnessing in India at the hands of the Hindu fanatics, will also become a norm in the Valley once Bahkts would call it home. The present pellet-gun-blind Kashmiri generation will no longer have the eyes to see the horrors that await future generations. It will also not have the will to fight anymore. If you think that the human rights abuses, detentions, torture, enforced disappearances, sexual abuse by the Indian security forces in IIOJK is at its worst now, wait until the Hindu settlements in the Valley are complete. If the world still hasn't woken up now, don't bet on its waking ever.

In my **SAV** article earlier this year, I had written about the imminent clash between the symbolic Kashmir and the strategic Kashmir. The **Symbolic Kashmir** is "a place where larger national and sub-national identities are ranged against each other. The conflict in this Kashmir is as much a clash between identities, imagination, and history, as it is a conflict over territory, resources,

and peoples.” In the **Strategic Kashmir**, in contrast, “the military establishments on both sides of the border insist that Kashmir is critical to the physical defense of their respective countries.” India always understood the Strategic Kashmir, so did Pakistan. Therefore, both worked towards securing and consolidating their own versions of the strategic Kashmir. It is the identities, the imagination and the history in the Symbolic Kashmir which India is now attempting to erase and Pakistan has left the field wide open for them to march on.

War Over Kashmir ?

Pakistan and Kashmiris do not have the luxury of time at their hands to mount a ‘long struggle’ against the brutal Indian occupation and annexation. However, the practicality of Pakistan going to war with India to liberate Kashmir is also simply not there for two reasons.

First, Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC will be the first casualty if India and Pakistan go to war. I am not even contemplating a full fledged conventional war between India and Pakistan with potential for escalation involving nuclear weapons. Even a limited conventional war between the two countries is bound to have a large casualty count in AJK. Are the Pakistanis and the Kashmiris ready with their body bags? In a virtual Kashmir Bootcamp discussion this summer, Kashmiris in the IIOJK categorically said that they preferred death over living under the brutal Indian occupation and if war gave them a shimmer of hope that future generations would taste freedom, they were ready for it at all costs. Is Pakistan ready to match that commitment? That is the question.

Second, Pakistan’s hands are tied and its war-fighting options limited due to its fragile economic situation which is finally witnessing an upward trend. An economically weak country moving to fight a war will not stand a chance before any lending state no matter how friendly (China, Saudi Arabia or UAE), or any financial institution, irrespective of what the compulsions are. Waging war to liberate Kashmir might look good on strategy papers or situation rooms or simulated

wargames, but in reality, Pakistan will suffer immense reputational costs if it were to think about starting a war or fighting one with India.

No Time for Strategic Patience

There is absolutely no doubt that Pakistan is in a tough spot. India wants Pakistan to accept the Indian decision of August 5, 2019 as *fait accompli*, pushing Pakistan to decide the future of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit and Baltistan like it did with Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh: **annex, assimilate and move on**. We have seen the reaction of the international community to the Indian annexation and occupation of J&K. Does anyone even care that India is trying to undermine the UNSC resolutions through the new domicile law? Does it matter to anyone that under the Law of Armed Conflict (IHL), it is a **war crime** to transfer population into an occupied territory (4th Geneva Convention)? No one cares and it does not matter. If it mattered, India would have been named and shamed at every international human rights forum without Pakistan pushing for it.

What should Pakistan do? Should Pakistan juxtapose what India did on August 5, 2019 and take the Indian bait? Should it assimilate AJ&K and GB and give it provincial status so that the Indian claim on these two territories is forever laid to rest? Should Pakistan wage a war to liberate Kashmir irrespective of the costs involved? Should Pakistan work with China to create difficult circumstances for India (read two-front war) in Ladakh enough to leverage the situation whereby India is bound to reverse its August 5th decision and restore the status quo ante in J&K?

There are no easy answers for these questions but it is about time that we started an honest discourse on these options no matter how uncomfortable it makes us feel. Public narrative must be generated on these issues to inform policy. Pakistan's Kashmir strategy can no longer be a top-down approach.

EXPLORING THE IMPULSES IN PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

Pakistan's foreign policy can be understood with respect to three impulses: the normative, statist, and structural. First, the normative impulse is a constitutive element of the Pakistani nation-state project, including ideological and self-definitional tropes such as culture, values, religion, and history based on its Islamic identity. The key question is to what extent Pakistan's Islamic identity provides explanations for its foreign policy when international relations literature considers the national interest a more reliable predictor of foreign policy than identity or ideology. Second, the statist strand in Pakistan's foreign policy demonstrates a path-dependent fixation on a traditional paradigm of security as a defense against external threats. These regional threat perceptions emanate from two of its immediate neighbors: from Afghanistan, via the Durand Line conflict; from India, over Kashmir, its core security problematique. Third, the structural impulse is indicative of policy inputs from the international system, and, specifically, great powers over which Pakistan exercises little control. The growing strategic rivalry between the United States and China, for instance, directly impacts Pakistan's foreign policy as Pakistan attempts to navigate between the two powers without jeopardizing its relations with either of them. These three imperatives provide insight into Pakistan's two key foreign policy goals: achieving economic redemption and regulating traditional security.

1. Normative dimensions in Pakistan foreign policy

Does Islam as a normative ideal provide a solid explanation for Pakistan's foreign policy since independence or does foreign policy have to do more with the attainment of national interest objectives? The Islamic identity is often invoked as a key element in the first Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan's side-stepping of an official invitation from the Soviet Union in 1949 and, instead, visiting the United States in May 1950 because the "godless" communist ideology of the Soviet Union tampered with Pakistan's religious sensitivities. This ideological dimension was conveniently set aside when it came to China, the countervailing communist power. Pakistan recognized Communist China as early as 1950 and initiated bilateral relations with the Chinese state despite engagement in military defense alliances with the United States.

The interplay of Islamic identity and national interests is also apparent in Pakistan's outreach to the Muslim world. This outreach was patchy in the initial years as Pakistan's national interest dictated a pro-Western foreign policy and a less enthusiastic response to Arab nationalism. In 1956, Pakistan's Prime Minister Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy, lamenting on the state of the Muslim world, reiterated: "zero plus zero plus zero plus zero is after all equal to that, zero."

National interest dictating foreign policy choices is a theme both for Pakistan and also for the Muslim states Pakistan has invoked as its allies after India revoked Article 370 granting Jammu

and Kashmir semi-autonomous status in August 2019. The Pakistani Foreign Minister recently blamed Saudi Arabia for its lack of support for convening a special session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on Kashmir, which came after it reduced its aid for Pakistan. This is a small example of how normative idealism—solidarity, as a Muslim-majority country, with Pakistan in its stance on Muslim-majority Kashmir—matters increasingly less in foreign policymaking. This, combined with the Muslim countries' pursuit of peace with Israel, indicates changing strategic realities that Pakistan's foreign policy must contend with in the future.

While threats persist, the key question is whether Pakistan can move beyond these to build more favorable engagements with its neighboring states, specifically India and Afghanistan.

2. The security dynamic

Pakistan's search for security—understood in the classical realist sense—involves the politics of national survival, territorial integrity, military empowerment, and an excessive, if not exclusive, concern with threats. In the immediate aftermath of independence, secessionist fears in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North West Frontier Province) and Balochistan, where the princely state of Kalat proclaimed its independence in August 1947, heightened security threat dynamics. Within Pakistan's strategic establishment, these threats justify and contribute to an internalized militarized security stance that informs its approach to regional security. This remains the case and is exemplified in the 2016 arrest of an Indian spy, Kulbushan Jadhav, in Balochistan, and Afghan support for anti-Pakistan Baloch militant outfits. While threats persist, the key question is whether Pakistan can move beyond these to build more favorable engagements with its neighboring states, specifically India and Afghanistan.

Pakistan-India relations have been, over the past decade, a story of missed opportunities. The most recent phase of goodwill between former Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif and Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi was in 2014 and 2015, when the two leaders showed promise, potential, and vision for a South Asia connected through trade and business. This initial bonhomie crumbled when the Pathankot air force base was attacked only two weeks after Modi's surprise visit to Lahore. India-Pakistan relations have not recovered since and have instead deteriorated to the point where recovery seems elusive, especially in light of India's unilateral actions in Kashmir. Traditional security dynamics are likely to persist in Pakistan's foreign policy, with incumbent governments facing difficulty justifying trade and cooperative engagement with India unless the latter reverses its abrogation of Article 370.

Regarding Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan, recent moves towards an intra-Afghan peace settlement provide grounds for optimism, including the opening of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border for trade. For example, ships transiting fertilizers to Afghanistan can now berth at Gwadar Port. However, challenges to Pakistan's foreign policy in a post-peace agreement scenario persist, including the risk of Afghanistan descending into a state of brutal civil war, as in the 1990s. Pakistan's foreign policy interests necessitate promoting a peaceful

Afghanistan and doubling down on Islamic militancy—recognizing its disastrous repercussions on the Pakistani state and society, which further fractures Pakistan’s image in the international community.

3. Structural imperatives and Pakistan’s foreign policy

Structural imperatives stemming from an international system over which Pakistan has little control have impacted Pakistan’s foreign policy, mostly after the 1979 and 2001 invasions of Afghanistan respectively. At both junctures, it was virtually impossible for Pakistan to desist from the developing security situation on its Western border. During both episodes, while Pakistan remained the United States’ most steadfast ally, it retained its close ties with China. Most recently Pakistan finds itself uneasily positioned between the United States and China as the distribution of capabilities in the international system accentuates China as a global strategic rival and competitor to the United States. This is evident in the United States’ sharp criticism of Pakistan’s participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which makes it difficult for Pakistan to lean on one side without courting the other’s displeasure.

Most recently Pakistan finds itself uneasily positioned between the United States and China as the distribution of capabilities in the international system accentuates China as a global strategic rival and competitor to the United States.

In its initial two years, the current Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) government, sought improved ties with the United States, with a major government advisor reiterating the slowing down of CPEC projects and renegotiating CPEC deals of the previous government. At the same time, the Trump administration was very critical of Pakistan, accusing the country of using IMF loans to pay off its Chinese debts. Pakistan’s perfect opportunity came with the Trump Administration’s pursuit of a peace process in Afghanistan, positioning Pakistan as a key player. Despite developing strategic ties between Pakistan and the United States, U.S. criticism of Chinese investments in Pakistan via CPEC has not abated. Alice Wells, a former U.S. ambassador, criticized the Corridor on multiple occasions for increasing Pakistan’s debt burden and dependency on China.

Where does this leave Pakistan and its foreign policy? It remains to be seen if Pakistan sees any concrete economic incentives for supporting the Afghan peace process. For now, Pakistan’s current government is hedging its bets on U.S. support in securing an exit from the Financial Action Task Force’s grey list and foregoing its initial skepticism of CPEC by fast-tracking CPEC projects.

Conclusion

Henceforward, Pakistan's foreign policy challenge will remain three-pronged: first, zeroing on its national interest as opposed to normative idealism in its ties with the Muslim world and consolidating CPEC in order to reverse its economic downturn; second, promoting regional peace with neighboring countries and curtailing military threats that compromise economic gains; and, finally, continued global multilateral engagements with the international community to eliminate either/or scenarios where Pakistan is pushed to choose between the United States and China. However, as the U.S.-China dyad intensifies, Pakistan's balanced navigation between the two powers will be tested, demanding a much tougher proposition of assurances and reassurances to both powers that its foreign policy outreach does not approximate a zero-sum game.

18TH AMENDMENT: THE CASE OF REVISITING IT

“In the devolution system, powers are transferred from provinces to local administration, But here we see that our local bodies don’t enjoy any power. All powers are enjoyed by the chief minister and he has become a kind of dictator. He’s not offering powers to the local administration. The effective devolution functioning requires a three-tier system but here it’s stuck in two tiers.” This statement by PM Imran Khan to media journalists at the Governor house Sindh reignited the debate about “reviewing” the 10-year-old 18th Amendment, issued during the PPP government. The 18th Amendment has been the most effective step in turning Pakistan from a unitary system to a federation in line with the constitution of 1973. The 18th amendment was a significant constitutional change in the history of Pakistan as it was enacted through a broad multi-party consensus rather than unilateral will.

The main focus of the 18th amendment was to keep in check the power of the central government so that it does not become absolute in nature. Another one of the achievements of the 18th amendment that have now come under fire and lay the basis for the discussions about reviewing the amendment is its “National Finance Commission” Award, or the NFC award. In the light of the recent pandemic, the government of Pakistan has criticized the NFC award and its distribution of finances for not being able to respond promptly and effectively to the health crisis of COVID-19. The NFC award in-abled the government to issue a national response towards the health crisis. Although to some extent this might be true but this is not the first time that the NFC award is under attack, in 2018 the NFC award was under attack for not providing the government with enough funds for national defense. This may be the government’s critique on the NFC award however the problem lies not with the award or the 18th amendment rather with the government’s inability to raise revenue to provide for its national defense funds.

The 18th amendment has not yet been implemented to its full potential. Although very influential in the constitutional history of Pakistan, however not free of all the flaws the 18th amendment has shown its lacking’s. These lacks are mainly in the form of the governance gap which has now given room to dialogue about “revisiting” it. With weakening the federal umbrella and providing more financial authority to the provincial system, this amendment has made ways for more financial scams than there would have been if the federal checks and accountability were insured. For example, the “Fake accounts Case” in Sindh registered by NAB could further prove the inability of federal government to maintain financial accountability and security at provincial level.

One other major problem that has been identified in the past 5 years is the impact of the 18th amendment on the common man. The issues of the common man remain the same under the unitary system or the federation system. Therefore, the criticism arises that the amendment focused more on devolution of powers rather the influence it would have on the overall legal framework of the country. A country like Pakistan required along with devolution of power, “de-centralization” of power so as to achieve a balance approach towards all the provinces.

More so, the amendment lacked in planning and setting up of infrastructures and resources required for this newly “devolved” power as it has been a great obstacle in the way of good governance. The availability of good infrastructure and resources at provincial level is incremental for the good governance to flow from the top of the government to the grass root level, i.e. to the common man.

The concerns regarding the health ministry under the provincial level have not just come to the surface after the covid-19 situation but even international health organization like WHO have raised concerns over it. In 2011, WHO expressed its concerns for the health ministry devolved on a provincial basis in a letter to the then prime minister PM Gillani. The letter wrote, “The provinces did not have enough resources, infrastructure, and medical staff and if the provinces were given the responsibility of the health sector in such circumstances, it would wreak havoc.”

Having said all of this, it is without a doubt that after 10 years of being issues now the 18th amendment has shown areas that require further amendment and work however the response to the debate of “revisiting 18th amendment” has been very strong, and some even called it an attack on the democracy. This criticism received only against the idea of “revisiting” the 18th amendment seems as if the amendment itself is a sacred un-alterable piece of doctrine, which should not be touched. Saad Rasool a lawyer, while speaking in a talk show in Dunya news says that,” The constitution is an adaptive document therefore any questions related to its changes or further amendments should not be used as a political tool to manipulate political interest at the cost of national interests.”

This treatment of the amendment could result in a loss of growth and potential in terms of the efficacy of the federal system of Pakistan. Like any other legislative piece, the 18th amendment should also be open to dialogue and direct scrutiny of multiple stake holders, only this revisiting attitude towards the amendment can guarantee its longevity.

EDUCATION IN THE PANDEMIC AGE :

Education in the pandemic age underwent a drastic change from inter-personal learning to virtual learning. But this transition was not smooth for stratified societies across the world. As the shift to e-learning required wherewithal that many countries lacked, the digital divide entrenched itself in societies and raised the ante of inequality. Rather than being the Great Equalizer that education is usually termed, it became a big divider, overnight. This also highlighted the fact that how misplaced priorities and reactive policies could cost to developing countries including Pakistan. It was also widely reported that like any other misfortune that befalls societies end up hitting women hard, likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic made women great sufferers.

Unenviable scenario of education pre-Covid worsened during the pandemic: Even during the normal times, education was not prioritized in low- and lower-middle income countries. Poverty and discrimination played havoc with people belonging to lower strata of society. As per the United Nations report, two years ago the number of out-of-school children was around two hundred and sixty million. And with worldwide shutdowns followed by pandemic more than one billion children globally have been deprived of learning.

Governments in most countries were already paying little to no heed to the lofty goal of achieving inclusive education by 2030, the pandemic has made it quite a daunting task now. Thus, education in the pandemic age is unattainable for the marginalized groups girls, immigrants, ethnic minorities and the disabled.

Novel concept of “Flipped Classroom”- unfathomable for developing countries: History is witness to the fact that technology has played a pivotal role in transition of societies. Some scholars have proposed flipped classroom that empowers the learner as it makes the learning experience more student friendly. Especially during the pandemic it is the most viable option, provided of course the internet availability and related devices. But during the pandemic, technology has become a tool in catapulting the poor from the social mobility. Resultantly, the chasm between the haves and the have-nots has widened since many people could not afford learning pods. Availability of the required stuff for undisrupted learning highlights wealth disparity in education. Thus, access to education in the pandemic age was not for all and sundry.

Deepening of gender disparity in education during pandemic:

Teaching in the pandemic age was equally challenging. Work from home and tend household chores were really back-breaking labor for an individual left with very little time for oneself. Arlie Hochschild, a sociologist, calls this dilemma faced by women as “the second shift”. This increased role conflict resulted in burnout among teachers. Some of them even opted for a role exit which led to “feminization of poverty”. Thus, education in the pandemic age was not everyone’s cup of tea.

“The digital playing field is anything but level” in the pandemic age:

It was witnessed that globally only a fraction of students had the access to bandwidth and connectivity. In countries like Pakistan, the governments tried taking a multi-platform approach to remote learning. Through programs like Teleschool, it was tried to curtail the long-term loss of learning. Yet the existing issues like frequent blackouts, lackluster response of unlearned parents towards education, lack of motivation on the part of some learners, inter alia, have impacted education in the pandemic age.

Learning Poverty in Pakistan in the age of pandemic:

The country was already undergoing a learning crisis. As reported by Alif Ailaan the learning capabilities of students was not up to the par. They were lagging behind in skills of reading, writing and solving mathematics; even by the middle class these skill set were not acquired. There were already twenty-two million out-of-school children in Pakistan, the World Bank report “Learning Losses in Pakistan Due to Covid-19 School Closure: A Technical Note on Simulation Results” has further predicted learning poverty. As the pandemic is forcing many people to make a tough choice between education and earning, dropout rates will increase in foreseeable future. This will eventually cause the country economic loss between \$67 billion and \$155 billion in GDP at its current value, as around 930,000 children will dropout from primary and secondary schools.

It was disheartening to see the government more focused on the debate of Single National Curriculum and cut in the budget of Higher Education Commission for fiscal year 2020-21, than on swift adaptability to modern ways by teacher training in latest technology and equipment of the related material. It is high time that education – the panacea for learning poverty and the collateral damage- is paid due attention for a holistic development in this unprecedented time of pandemic.

Way forward:

Though the crisis is amplifying the inequalities that are already inherent in education system, it can serve as wake up call for the governments to redirect their focus on education. Pakistan and many other countries not well-equipped with technological prowess, can adopt a hybrid model by investing in the traditional infrastructure of education alongside the much-needed digital space. Moreover, the curriculum needs to be made more adaptable to e-learning so that in the long run educational institutions could easily switch to flipped classroom that are there to revolutionize learning experience.

THE AGRICULTURE CHALLENGE

Bringing innovative solutions to the growers and helping them achieve sustainable farming is the only option for coping with the challenges of today's agriculture sector

The agriculture sector in Pakistan faces major challenges, including depleting water resources, lack of technological innovation, low-quality seeds, and input supply, among others.

Water resources are the lifeline for Pakistan. Since 1950s, the expanse of irrigated land has tripled. Around 90 percent of the water use today goes to irrigate fields. The data obtained by the Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-17 shows that the share of agricultural output in the gross domestic product (GDP) is 19.5 percent, providing 42.3 percent employment to the labour force.

Pakistan's major crops are wheat, rice, cotton, maize and sugarcane. Together these account for about 63 percent of the total cropped area. Production of three important crops namely: rice, cotton and sugarcane as well as 90 percent of wheat and most of maize, is confined to irrigated areas.

A report of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences, Islamabad (PASI) published in 2019 states that the minimum per capita domestic water requirement is 50 litres whereas 2,600 to 5,300 litres water is needed to grow food for one person per day. Therefore, food security is directly related to water security as 50 to 70-times more water is required to grow food than the water used for domestic needs.

However, Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) warned in 2016 that the country may run dry by 2025. A UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 2016 report says that the major threat that Pakistan faces today is not terrorism but water scarcity. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), per capita annual water availability in Pakistan has dropped to 1,017 cubic metres from 5300 in 1947 — the situation is close to the scarcity threshold of 1,000 cubic metres.

Suleman Khan, chairman of the Sindh Taas Water Council, says the increasing demand for water and its erratic supply are resulting in water shortages. Population growth, rapid urbanisation, water-intensive farming practices and industrialisation have contributed to Pakistan's increasing demand for more water. "Pakistan's water profile has changed drastically from being a water abundant country, to one experiencing water stress. Thus, water related problems are, undoubtedly, amongst the key challenges for Pakistan."

In Pakistan, the total water supply available to agriculture comes from three sources: rainfall, surface water from the River Indus and its tributaries and ground water. Sewage water and sea water supplement these in some areas.

"The main source of water in Pakistan is the canal irrigation system. The Indus valley, comprising the planes of Punjab and Sindh is mainly dependent on the water of river Indus and its tributaries, as the area is mostly arid on the basis of annual precipitation," Khan says while talking to *TNS*.

Food production is dependent mainly on land and water resources. IWMI's (International Water Management Institute) Physical and Economic Water Scarcity Indicators show that the countries that will not be able to meet the estimated water demands in 2025, even after accounting for the future adaptive capacity, are called "physically water scarce".

DW reports that Pakistan has the world's fourth-highest rate of water use. Its water intensity rate — the amount of water in cubic meters used per unit of GDP — is the world's highest. This suggests that no economy is more water-intensive than Pakistan's. The IMP ranks Pakistan third in the world among countries facing acute water shortage.

“Pakistan has one of the largest contiguous irrigation systems in the world yet it is one of the most inefficient irrigation systems where more than 60 percent of the water is lost due to leakage and seepage and at the field level due to poor irrigation methods,” says Dr Muhammad Azeem Ali Shah, a senior regional researcher at the IWMI.

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According to Pakistan Academy of Sciences, Islamabad, Pakistan has one of the world's largest groundwater aquifers (4th after China, India and the USA). It provides more than 60 percent of irrigation water supplies and over 90 percent of drinking water. The groundwater has played a major role in increasing the overall cropping intensity in Pakistan from about 63 percent in 1947 to over 120 percent in 2018. Nevertheless, 74.3 percent of fresh water is being extracted annually.

“It is the only reliable resource that provides resilience against droughts and climate change impacts. However, this resource is freely accessible. In the absence of any regulatory framework, anyone can install any number of tube wells, of any capacity, anywhere and can pump any amount of water and sell it to others. This resulted in groundwater depletion,” adds Azeem Shah.

Water shortage for agriculture, experts say, can be managed through professional water management, soil and water conservation technologies, enhanced use of high-efficiency irrigation systems, developing drought-resistant varieties, and introducing climate-smart agriculture.

“To help reduce water losses at the tertiary level, methods like ensuring laser levelling; ridge/bed sowing at field level; improvement of outlets can greatly reduce losses from water channels. Use of rain gun, drip irrigation and sprinkle irrigation may be encouraged, especially in the hilly areas, sandy soils, and for high value crops,” suggests Azeem.

“One of the most significant instances of poor administration is the mishandling of yield zoning. High delta yields, for example rice and sugarcane, are grown in zones where surface water is lacking and groundwater is profound and saline,” he says, adding, “These yields in such regions have gigantic stress on groundwater, resulting in water scarcity and salinisation.”

Unfortunately, growers are the victims of this situation. Farmers Associates Pakistan director and Agri Commission member, Farooq Bajwa, says most of the farmers are uneducated. “They do not know how to utilise new ways to manage water properly. In addition, they do not have the funds to adopt new technologies to increase per acre crop yield.”

He adds, “Pakistan needs to work for a resilient agriculture sector to cope with climate change risks. This requires that growers be equipped with the latest methods of better water management. We need to have high-yield varieties that have the potential for both increasing crop yield and drought resistance like some African countries have successfully opted this kind of seed varieties.”

Head of Public Affairs and Sustainability, Bayer Pakistan, Azeem Khan Niazi tells *TNS* that Bayer has advanced capability in precision plant breeding and biotechnology. The breeding programmes are designed to address emerging needs of the farmers and local climatic changes. “Through precision breeding, we are able to shorten the breeding cycle of new climate resilient plants and bring better improved seed to farmer.”

Biotechnology has come a long way and several useful traits can now be introduced in plants that would provide protection against pests, increase drought tolerance and improve nutritional value of the crop, he says, adding, “Our drought-tolerant soybean and maize seeds require less water to deliver good yields for the farmer. Cultivation of tomato while using fewer natural inputs has been a success as well.”

Experts believe that bringing innovative solutions to the growers and help them achieve sustainable farming is the only option for coping with the challenges that today’s agriculture sector.

PULWAMA/BALAKOT AND THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES IN INDIA-PAKISTAN CRISES

Introduction

India and Pakistan have witnessed multiple crises since their overt nuclearization in 1998. Although the two countries fought three major wars before their respective nuclear tests, the presence of nuclear weapons made post-1998 crises more dangerous and drew global attention to de-escalation.

After failing to stop nuclear weapons development by India and Pakistan, the United States became more concerned with ensuring that no nuclear exchange take place between the two rival countries.¹ This objective inevitably drew the United States into the role of a crisis manager, a role which solidified when the first nuclearized South Asian crisis erupted at Kargil in 1999 and President Clinton's direct involvement enabled India and Pakistan to step back from the brink.

Since the Kargil crisis, the United States has become the de-facto crisis manager in South Asia—possessing leverage over the primary parties, the necessary means and intelligence to anticipate the developing situation, and the political clout necessary to pressure both countries to de-escalate. The U.S. role as third-party mediator strengthened with each new crisis in later years. From Twin Peaks (2001-02) to Mumbai (2008) there was more active U.S. involvement in defusing the tensions between India and Pakistan that included top-level diplomacy and high-level official visits.² However, after the 2008 Mumbai attack, there was growing frustration and a strong desire in India to establish itself in the region by taking action against Pakistan over the charges of cross-border terrorism. This growing impatience was illustrated in the “surgical strikes” following a terror attack in Uri in 2016. India's assertiveness became more visible during the 2019 Pulwama/Balakot crisis, as India departed from its traditional restrained response targeted mainland Pakistan in the Balakot strikes. India's forceful response after the terror attack in Pulwama was a major shift that also manifested a diminishing role of the United States as an effective third party in containing the crisis to lower levels.

This policy memo provides an overview of the changing trends and evolving role of third-party mediation in South Asia to assess what impact it may have on future crises. Shifting dynamics—including greater risk-taking actions by India and Pakistan in order to establish escalation dominance in a crisis and a United States less inclined to play a neutral third party role—could raise the risk of escalation in future crises. Considering lessons from the Pulwama/Balakot crisis, this memo will propose recommendations for policymakers in India, Pakistan, and the United States to assess evolving crisis dynamics and potential openings for third-party crisis managers to assist in future de-escalation.

Shifting dynamics—including greater risk-taking actions by India and Pakistan in order to establish escalation dominance in a crisis and a United States less inclined to play a neutral third party role—could raise the risk of escalation in future crises.

The Problem of Inconsistent Third-Party Mediation

The escalation during the Pulwama/Balakot crisis was unprecedented, as two nuclear-armed states moved up the escalation ladder to a point of a conventional aerial dogfight. Unlike previous crises, where U.S.

involvement was more direct and visible in urging restraint, Washington's reported acquiescence to India's aggressive posture after the Pulwama attack indicated that the role of the United States as a reliable and neutral third party was shifting. The deployment of India's nuclear-capable submarine during the standoff and Prime Minister Modi's later signaling of India's threat to carry out a missile attack against Pakistan—and Pakistan's threat to respond if such an act was taken—further exposed both the eroding effectiveness of the United States as a safety valve between the two nuclear rivals and the high risks of greater escalation during the Pulwama/Balakot crisis.

The developments of the past decade have challenged U.S. credibility as a neutral third party. Most significant has been the US tilt towards India that began with the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal under the Bush administration and solidified with President Obama's pivot towards Asia and rebuilding of strategic ties with India. These developments have raised concerns for Pakistan over the U.S. role as a neutral crisis manager. In the aftermath of the Balakot airstrikes, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval's claim that the United States had recognized India's right to self-defense following his phone call with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo suggested the U.S. had sided with India—thereby departing from its position as a “neutral” mediator.

As a result of this perceived lean towards India along with growing Indian assertiveness, the United States seems to have weakened its leverage with both India and Pakistan, as evident from the more aggressive posture by both the South Asian states. This has opened space for greater regional involvement in crisis management—as shown during the Pulwama/Balakot crisis. For example, there are indications China may have tried to fill in the gaps to control the escalating situation and played a more pronounced role during the crisis by urging restraint as a regional power. While China's role in crisis management merits further research, the involvement of additional third parties has the potential to complicate the situation instead of resolving it as the United States departs from its traditional primary mediator role. Mainly because of the United States' political clout to influence the involved parties' behavior and the access to intelligence to deal with rapidly developing situations.

The Pulwama/Balakot episode also underscored the argument by some that outsourcing crisis management to a third party is inherently destabilizing as it is based on potentially misplaced trust that the third party will intervene before the crisis becomes out of control. This can also lead the competing states to feel more incentivized to engage in a policy of brinkmanship. In addition, a third party's motivation to intervene in a crisis may be different at any given point in time, hence increasing the chance of miscalculation by the competing states that in turn would challenge the strategic stability in the region.

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Evaluating the Pulwama/Balakot Crisis

The Pulwama/Balakot crisis not only followed a different path from previous crises, it drew different lessons as well for the parties involved. The triggering terrorist incident happened at the peak of the Indian election campaign where the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had promised a tougher stance on Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi's calls for a reprisal against any terrorist activity may have contributed to a response focused on punishing Pakistan that in turn would contribute to Modi's image as a strong

leader. The Modi government showed its willingness to escalate with the first ever airstrikes in Pakistan proper since 1971—bringing two nuclear-armed countries to the brink of a major war.

One of the stark contrasts from previous crises was the delayed and desultory intervention by the United States—at least in the public arena. The statement by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo terming India’s airstrike inside Pakistan a “counter-terrorism action” was unprecedented and an indication of a clear American tilt in India’s favor. It was only after Pakistan shot down an Indian aircraft and captured its pilot and once India made retaliatory missile threats that the United States began active and visible intervention—calling for both India and Pakistan to show restraint and not escalate the crisis further. President Trump’s statement during his high-profile visit to Hanoi for a second summit with North Korea announcing “reasonably decent news” from South Asia indicated a potentially more active U.S. role in lowering the hostilities. Many U.S. officials and analysts claim, in contrast, that the United States was actively engaging from the very beginning of the crisis. The fact that such engagement largely happened behind the scenes versus in public, however, contributes to an impression that such efforts were more limited than in previous crises.

From Twin Peaks to Pulwama/Balakot: What Has Changed?

Contrary to previous crises where both India and Pakistan exercised restraint, the Pulwama/Balakot crisis indicated a higher threshold for risk acceptance by both India and Pakistan. Despite a certain degree of restraint, the crisis illustrated attempts to achieve escalation dominance by showing a tolerance towards escalatory risks. The U.S. crisis posture also shifted to a tacit approval of India’s aggression on the pretext of right to self-defense—a trend that began during the Uri crisis with Washington’s conspicuous silence over India’s claims of surgical strikes inside Pakistan. U.S. acquiescence in favor of India was also visible in its methods of engagement during the Pulwama/Balakot crisis. In contrast, in previous crises such as Twin Peaks and the Mumbai attack U.S. engagement began at early stages of the crisis. During the Pulwama/Balakot crisis, however, active, public U.S. engagement to push both countries for restraint started only after India’s Balakot strike. That, too, seemed initially to favor India as indicated by Secretary Pompeo’s statement. Further, the relatively late and tilted engagement failed to successfully dissuade Pakistan from taking retaliatory action after Balakot.

What Caused the Change?

The changes in behavior and tactics of both the primary and third parties are linked to shifting regional dynamics. The Indo-U.S. strategic partnership on the one hand brought India and the United States together in their joint objective of containing Chinese influence in the region. On the other side, Pakistan-U.S. relations had been deteriorating, particularly after Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan and the 2011 NATO attacks on two Pakistani military check posts at Salala killed 24 Pakistani soldiers. India’s accusations of being a victim of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism received increasing bipartisan support in the United States and resultantly led to diminishing U.S. patience with Pakistan. In addition, the bin Laden raid set a precedent and made it difficult for the United States to stop India from undertaking similar action against Pakistan on counterterrorism grounds. Finally, growing Pakistan-China connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative’s flagship project the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

led to greater interdependency between China and Pakistan that increasingly stood opposed to Indo-U.S. joint regional objectives.

India's more aggressive response during Pulwama/Balakot may also have been the result of a commitment trap with its domestic audience. When the BJP came to power in 2014, it announced a tougher stance on terrorism. This proclamation both suggested that India would take more aggressive action and highlighted the potential limitation of third-party mediation in any future crisis. After the 2016 terror attack in Uri Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi placed the blame on Pakistan stating: "Pakistan can't go unpunished," and promised a response. This resulted in a "surgical strike" in which India claimed a swift military operation across the Line of Control (LoC) on militant hideouts. Pakistan did not accept the Indian narrative and dismissed India's claims as an "illusion." Regardless of the challenged veracity of India's claims and the subsequent Pakistani denial, the assertions of surgical strikes upped the ante in South Asian crises. Due to the muted international response to India's proclaimed surgical strike, the risk of more direct confrontation in the future became increasingly apparent. The lack of direct condemnation of Indian claims by the United States was viewed as tacit approval and may have contributed to India's confidence that it could carry out a strike on mainland Pakistan in response to Pulwama.

The U.S. role in the Pulwama/Balakot episode raises concerns for future crisis dynamics and crisis management efforts. Although the crisis eventually de-escalated, this seemed to be more the work of a fortunate off-ramp with Pakistan's return of the captured pilot rather than sustained U.S. engagement.

Policy Recommendations

The U.S. role in the Pulwama/Balakot episode raises concerns for future crisis dynamics and crisis management efforts. Although the crisis eventually de-escalated, this seemed to be more the work of a fortunate off-ramp with Pakistan's return of the captured pilot rather than sustained U.S. engagement. Both India and Pakistan claimed victory in the aftermath of the Pulwama/Balakot crisis, suggesting each side may take dangerously different lessons from the incident. This risks contributing to future crises by strengthening the belief that it is possible to fight a limited war under the nuclear overhang. Emboldening India to use its "right to self-defense" sets a dangerous precedent and may potentially be replicated by Pakistan as well in the future if not discouraged in strongest terms today. The United States' longstanding strategic objective of avoiding nuclear war in South Asia may be compromised as it becomes increasingly difficult to predict and manage the speed at which India and Pakistan may climb the escalation ladder.

In this regard, what follows is a set of recommendations for the consideration of policymakers in India, Pakistan, and the United States to avoid such close encounters in future.

Recommendations for policymakers in India and Pakistan

Pulwama/Balakot risk assessment commission

India and Pakistan may establish national risk assessment commissions respectively to understand escalation risks following the Indian airstrike on mainland Pakistan. Much of the information on what transpired on February 26-27 remains secret barring some selective snippets, which are of unconfirmed authenticity and came to light largely in support of respective national narratives. While both India and Pakistan claimed victory after Pulwama/Balakot, each would be better prepared to face future crises

having made an objective risk assessment to identify potential gaps that could have led to unwarranted crisis escalation.

Increased emphasis on developing bilateral escalation control mechanisms (vs. reliance on third parties)

India and Pakistan are competing to strengthen nuclear deterrence, but lack escalation control mechanisms. In the absence of bilateral control mechanisms, India and Pakistan have largely relied on third parties for escalation control during a crisis. For instance, during the Kargil conflict of 1999 and the Twin Peaks crisis of 2001-2002, it was only after U.S. involvement that the crisis de-escalated. The inherent risks associated with the practice of outsourcing crisis management to a third party, as discussed in the previous section, highlight the need to establish bilateral escalation control mechanisms to ensure that a crisis does not lead to an all-out war and potentially to nuclear exchange. These escalation control mechanisms may include strengthening existing communication links and establishing new communication channels. Notwithstanding the failure of existing communication channels during crisis time, it is important to be more creative and find ways and means to establish some workable options, such as exploring methods to establish backchannel communications to avoid unnecessary media/public attention.

Legal course to address mutual grievances/terrorism charges

It is important that both India and Pakistan share actionable evidence, if available as claimed by both sides, for a proper legal investigation. This step will mutually benefit both states, each of which blames the other for terror activities inside their jurisdiction, while they also face home-grown terrorist threats. This will also help address the growing challenge of attribution for terror attacks particularly inside Kashmir. In view of the risk of the emergence of IS affiliates in India and Pakistan it is even more important to distinguish the existing terror networks from that of the Islamic State, which could manipulate the simmering tensions between the two states.

Shifting focus from crisis management to conflict resolution

It is high time for India and Pakistan to shift their focus from crisis management to conflict resolution. For decades both the states have remained stuck in managing the crisis at hand without any meaningful follow-up effort to resolve of outstanding issues. This includes the Kashmir dispute, which is at the core of most crisis escalation. However, in view of the more hardline stance of the incumbent BJP government in India and its decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, there is a low probability of a peaceful breakthrough at least in near future.

It is high time for India and Pakistan to shift their focus from crisis management to conflict resolution. For decades both the states have remained stuck in managing the crisis at hand without any meaningful follow-up effort to resolve of outstanding issues.

Recommendations for U.S. policymakers

Reclaiming neutrality

The post-Uri trend of U.S. tacit support for Indian military action on Pakistani soil in response to terrorist incidents has exposed the inherent risks of uncontrolled crisis escalation. The U.S. mediation process has limitations which are exacerbated if it is perceived as allowing a free hand to one of the parties. Even if India's actions post-Uri and during Pulwama/Balakot were meant to remain under a certain escalation threshold, there is always the risk of inadvertently going up the escalation ladder more quickly than anticipated. It is therefore important for the United States to re-evaluate how to position itself as a neutral mediator, notwithstanding the nature of relationship with each conflicting state. In addition, if the United States wants to retain a mediator role, it should be involved at the onset of the crisis—or else it would appear to be giving one country the opportunity to escalate and thus lose credibility.

Dealing with India-Pakistan under the same bureaucratic chain

While the U.S. State Department deals with India and Pakistan under the bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, the two countries are handled under different bureaucratic baskets in the U.S. Department of Defense. India is under U.S.-Indo Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) while Pakistan is under the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). During a crisis, this bifurcation creates communication hurdles and makes it difficult to read signs of growing tensions and take quick actions. It is therefore recommended that there should be a cross-combatant-command coordination process to serve as a communication channel and facilitate a more coordinated and robust approach during both peace and crisis time.