

## Developing a foreign policy for Pakistan

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By **Najm us Saqib**

A nation may stop daydreaming of having a strong foreign policy in the face of diminishing credibility, weak economic indicators, regular political upheavals, a feeble judicial system, serious governance issues and a demoralised Foreign Service. In such a grim domestic situation, even a U Thant of diplomacy would feel handicapped in defending one's capital's standpoint.

Questions are being raised on the 'failing' foreign policy of Pakistan. Is the troika of foreign policy, comprising the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Foreign Secretary, with the active and sincere support of all serving and retired members of the Foreign Service good enough to reverse the tide? Include in it the inputs from other stakeholders and ask the same question again. Sadly, the answer is not in the affirmative. The combination of a bold Prime Minister, an astute Foreign Minister and a hardworking Foreign Secretary along with those who wield power of making last minute changes may succeed in getting some supportive nods from a few friendly countries. It is certainly not enough to formulate a strong and favourable foreign policy.

Foreign policy is not about issuing bold statements or making ornate suggestions or urging the world to do the right thing. It is almost impossible to hoodwink the contemporary digitised world with insubstantial statements. Such hollow claims are not taken seriously by the international community unless one's own house is in order. One must be able to possess the requisite will and more importantly the power to substantiate such statements. Otherwise, mere speeches and statements invariably fall on deaf ears or bring grins to the faces of friends and foes alike. In the event of a country reflecting delightfully strong domestic indicators, one would not even be worried a bit to ask one's diplomats to 'do more'. The road of diplomacy would already be placid and easy to ride on.

Intertwined with the domestic socio-politico-economic situation, the foreign policy of a country cannot be shaped by hiring expensive foreign policy experts or revamping the bureaucratic system or posting 'good Ambassadors' at important Embassies. Neither can friends be won in the international arena without possessing either the power to inflict timely harm or render assistance at critical junctures.

Instead of following the Chinese, Turkish or Sri Lankan models, which were developed and followed as per the vision, strengths and weaknesses of these countries in the respective given times, let us develop an indigenously chalked out Pakistani model that caters for

the needs and aspirations of the people of the country. No 'outside-the-box' thinking may be entertained before thoroughly examining what is 'inside the box'.

Long-term planning for enjoying a favourable foreign policy must include the cherished objective of attaining a comfortable level of economic stability while being cognisant of the fact that a solid economic policy would invariably entail certain tough decisions. Secondly, no new promises may be made unless the previous ones are fulfilled or modified. Brilliant people like Dr Ishrat Hussain should not be wasted on inventing the wheel in the civil service. They should be requested to reflect and come up with a doable and concrete Pakistan-orientated economic policy that may be acceptable to the successive governments as well. Meanwhile, without harming anyone's interests, small steps can be initiated to assure the masses of the government's honesty of purpose such as lowering the prices of utilities, school fees and medicines, satiating the people's desire to have a caring government. IMF or no IMF, the people of Pakistan need an immediate relief package from the State.

Political stability and confidence of the people of Pakistan in their leadership may be set as a medium-term goal. Instead of relying on one's instincts or extending favours to one's favourites, all political decisions must be based on economic interests of the country. Leaving aside the decision to go nuclear in May 1998, there hasn't been a single decision in the past four decades that Pakistan took while exhibiting strength in the foreign policy domain. On the other hand, Pakistan is gradually running short of friends in the comity of nations while also losing space for effective negotiation. Hence, the assertion that Islamabad's foreign policy is failing is not without justification.

However, to say that five years is not sufficient time to at least set the ball rolling in the right direction is the negation of one's diplomatic and political prowess. Such an approach tends to deprecate one's knowledge of history and political science. The leadership, movers and shakers of the country may demonstrate the will to put Pakistan on the right track with honesty of purpose while looking beyond their specified terms and tenures.

In the short term, if we cannot make peace with enemies, let us strive to bring our old friends back while striving to make new ones. Let us mean what we say and say what we mean. For instance, announcing the 'Look Africa Policy' or admitting the importance of South America is meaningless if certain practical measures are not taken to translate these intentions into reality. We need to understand that Togo, Botswana, Bolivia and Peru have the same voting rights in the UN General Assembly as those of the US, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia. The foreign policy narrative must cater for these hitherto neglected continents.

The Foreign Office, being the focal point for both proposing a policy and subsequently implementing it, must be allowed to offer fresh ideas and proposals without fear or favour. Its role must not only be limited to the day-to-day firefighting or suggesting talking points for meetings or making country briefs. Exigently subsists a dire need of introducing certain

measures to boost the morale of the serving Officers of the Foreign Service beginning with streamlining the policy of postings and promotions and increasing their allowances according to the standard UN-based criteria. They are the ones who need motivation to project and promote the national interest of Pakistan abroad. Give them their due respect to earn respect for the country.

Explaining one's strategic vision and thoughtful reflections in intellectual frameworks could come in handy when delivering a speech at an international forum. One could also dream about leading the leaders of the world after making a presentation on one's Vision-2050. However, a favourable foreign policy could only be achieved through consistently taking hardcore measures in the internal socio-political and economic domains with honesty of purpose. Gone are the days of eating grass while manufacturing an atomic bomb. We have learned albeit through the hard way that one's atomic know-how does not help in bringing prosperity or lowering the prices of utilities.

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## Achieving sustainable development goals with nuclear technology

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By **Dr Syed Javaid Khurshid**

In 2015, 195 nations agreed under the UN to set out 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030. If achieved, it would have a lasting impact on the reduction of poverty and making health and education more accessible in the less developed countries. All the countries agreed to adopt these goals that would improve the lives of their citizens through Agenda 2030. These countries have to work devotedly to achieve the goals as there is no plan B.

Global challenges have become more complex after the Covid-19 outbreak. Working for SDGs was being done by many countries before the pandemic, but after it, the targets are disturbed and seem difficult to achieve by 2030. In 2015, the Pakistan Planning Commission incorporated these SDGs in its national economic planning. The action plans will play a fundamental role by translating these SDGs into workable actions. In Pakistan, incorporating the use of nuclear technology (N-tech) has played a significant role in achieving SDGs. It is good to remind ourselves that N-energy has also been used for the betterment of Pakistanis, and not only for making weapons.

It was recognised that SDGs can be more easily achieved by involving science and scientific communities and adopting innovative techs such as N-tech. N-tech is guided by IAEA internationally and PAEC nationally, which ensures that it is safe for use.

Pakistan is one of the largest recipients of IAEA's technical and financial help. It has achieved considerable expertise in the application of N-tech for peaceful purposes and is also using N-tech in achieving 9 of 17 SDGs, which are: Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition, Provision of Good Health and Well-Being, Access to Clean Water and Sanitation Facilities, Provision of Affordable and Clean Energy, Increase Industry Innovation and Infrastructure, Mitigation of Climate Change, Sustain Life Below Water, Sustain Life on Land, and Strengthening Partnerships for achieving Sustainable Goals.

In 2050, the world population may grow to 9.7 billion, thus increasing our need for more food by 60 percent. Currently, about 842 million people remain hungry every day and about 1 billion are food insecure. There is a need to increase food production by 60 percent to meet global needs. FAO underscores that there is little additional land available to grow more food crops. It requires that we must produce new varieties of high-yielding, disease-resistant, drought and salt-tolerant crops.

Three institutes working under PAEC are using N-techniques for high-yielding varieties. Until now they have developed about 115 new varieties of cash crops by radiation mutation, which cover about 35-40 percent of cultivable area, contributing 10 percent to crop productivity. But we need to meet the ever-rising future requirements. The radiation sterilisation technique such as male sterilisation is also used for insect pest management to protect crops such as sugarcane in Sindh. Pakistan is also developing mutant varieties rich in iron and zinc micronutrients. A commercial irradiation facility in Lahore is helping to increase the shelf life of perishable food items by removing harmful bacteria and insects. Pakistan is also using stable isotopes to monitor body composition, food intake and absorption of various nutrients to understand the problems of malnutrition.

People should be healthy so that they can work and support themselves and their families as well as contribute to the national economy. A healthy nation would be essential to achieve SDGs. Nuclear techniques are most important in cancer treatment and management of some other fatal diseases using nuclear medicine, radiation oncology, radiation treatment and radiation diagnosis modalities. The International Agency for Research in Cancer estimates that about 150 million people are suffering from cancer globally. Pakistan has about 30 cancer treatment facilities, whereas 10 out of these have either diagnostic or treatment facilities. These facilities are catering to 1,450,000 patients/year; PAEC and Shaukat Khanum Hospital are playing a key role in cancer treatment. In 2015, I suggested to the Planning Commission to establish a cancer control programme to achieve tertiary healthcare targets. The programme needs to be implemented in two phases and both phases should be implemented simultaneously. A very large number of cancer patients cannot be treated as they reach the hospital when the disease is already in an advanced stage. An early diagnosis would help the treatment and recovery of more patients. Allocation of funds for early diagnosis is very important. More importantly, cancer treatment facilities need to be doubled. We need diagnosis facilities after every 50 miles and treatment facilities after every 100 miles. Nuclear techniques are also in use in the precise diagnosis of cardiovascular disease, tuberculosis and many other infectious diseases. These are helping to detect and control outbreaks of animal diseases.

Water is essential for life. Pakistan is already placed among the water-stressed countries. The efficient use of water is important and groundwater management and conservation are needed. To achieve this goal Pakistan is utilising nuclear isotopic techniques for collecting information such as age, amount and quality of groundwater which is very useful in integrated management of water resources and water ecosystem. Nuclear tech is also being used to make water bacteria-free.

Producing sufficient energy at an affordable cost without emitting greenhouse gases is a very important SDG. The energy production choices will have huge consequences for health, economy and climate change. The world's energy mix at present shows 65 percent

fossil fuel, 16 percent hydropower, 13 percent nuclear power and 6-7 percent renewable energy. Besides hydel, renewable and nuclear are the clean sources of energy. The most important thing is that nuclear energy is an uninterrupted clean source of energy. Recognising the importance of nuclear energy, the first commercial nuclear power plant was connected to the grid in 1956 at Calder Hall, England. At present, 31 countries are operating about 449 N-plants for electricity generation, whereas about 67 are under construction in 16 countries. Pakistan recognised the importance of N-power and built its first commercial power plant in 1971, K-1 of 137MW at Karachi. Pakistan is producing about 6 percent of its energy mix by 5 N-plants, which is going to increase up to 12 percent this year after K-2 in May and K-3 in October 2021 start operation at Karachi. Nuclear power is the answer to Pakistan's future development, safety and security. PAEC has already given a 40-year plan to the government of achieving a target of 8800 MW by 2030, and 40,000 MW by 2048. The target of affordable and clean energy can only be achieved through nuclear energy, by installing more N-power projects on a BOT basis.

An excellent infrastructure and cutting-edge technologies are required to sustain and increase industrial growth. N-tech is contributing to achieving the indicators of this SDG by using Non-destructive X-ray techniques for quality testing of the products, such as welds, building and bridges and irradiation of wires, cable pipes and tyres to improve quality and durability. Irradiation is also used to remove bacteria from medical products, sterilising surgical instruments, and increasing the shelf life of food products such as onions, potatoes, spices and mangoes. Pakistan has done a lot of research and the first irradiator was established in 1987 at Lahore. At present two irradiators are working; one for single-use products and other for food products, whereas another electron beam sterilisation plant is coming up at Lahore. We should install two electron beam irradiators at Gwadar and one each at Gilgit and Karachi.

Temperature plays an important role in food production. Leading nuclear think tanks and research groups on "nuclear for climate" programmes in different countries agree that nuclear energy is the key in the fight against climate change. It is one of the reasons for considering an increase of N-power share in the energy mix. Pakistan has chalked out a programme to increase its nuclear energy production and help mitigate climate change. Protecting sea life is a significant SDG as marine life is one of the biggest and cheapest sources of nutritious food. Marine life can be studied by using isotopic techniques.

Land erosion is the biggest problem being faced the world over. About 1.5m acres is under erosion affecting several countries' economies. Many countries are contributing to help control this menace by using nuclear and isotopic techniques. N-techniques help to determine soil erosion rates. Based on these calculations remedial measures can be undertaken to restore soil, the ecosystem and biodiversity. IAEA is supporting many countries. Pakistan's two research institutes are using these techniques in controlling the saline land which makes about 30 percent of the cropping area.

Pakistan's challenge is to achieve SDGs for the prosperity of the country. Nuclear techniques have played an important role in making progress on many fronts for achieving these goals. Pakistan is lucky to have scientific know-how and trained manpower in the field. This should be further enhanced by IAEA's support. Pakistan is already the highest recipient of financial and technical know-how from IAEA in Asia. There is a need to develop the political will to coherently move with the UN and IAEA for utilising nuclear techniques to achieve sustainable development goals in the country by 2030.

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## Human rights a short story

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By **Arifa Noor**

PARLIAMENT has become so incidental to our politics, we rarely notice small but significant changes taking place within its hallowed halls. This isn't just because of our parties and their way of doing governance, though they share a greater responsibility than others.

Another reason for this has been television channels — controversial statements, ambiguous bayans which lead to headlines and breaking news, and fights between politicians are now brought to our homes every night, seven days a week. With these daily bulletins, few are interested in the speeches being made on the floor of parliament or the confrontations taking place there. (Even the parties themselves prefer those who can frequent talk shows over those who can carry out legislative work or deliver meaningful speeches on the floor).

As a result, parliamentary happenings have been reduced to the bits and pieces — mostly statements — appearing in news stories, which pale in front of the shorter, spicier talk shows (with a variety of politicians). No wonder then that the star journalists of the olden days, the reporter in the press gallery, assigned to report the proceedings, has now been replaced by the anchor with a prime-time show. It is the latter who the politicians now woo.

There is, however, another result of this transition to television — in times of print, the various committees of parliament provided much fodder to the hacks. Most of us in the business always knew that even if parliament was not in session, the committee meetings meant a nugget or two could always be found in a dusty meeting room here and there. And sometimes ever more. For example, in 2010, the health secretary told a Senate health committee that relief operations for the flood survivors were not possible in Jacobabad because the Shehbaz airbase was with the Americans. The story echoed for days in Islamabad. And in the heady days after 2008, the Public Accounts Committee, led by Chaudhry Nisar, whose vocal cords needed no rest, led the charge against the Musharraf regime much to our delight. But since then it too has become rather lacklustre.

And this is why perhaps, us oldies who still remember the good ol' days were happy with Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, who allowed us a brief trip down memory lane. Heading the human rights committee of the Senate, he highlighted issues close to us bleedin' heart types.

He allowed stories about the people to resonate in a building which has become rather distant from the citizens it is supposed to represent. And apart from the angry speeches

in parliament, stories about the people began in parliament and then made their way to the screen.

He called in young students who had been charged with sedition for their sin of protesting for their rights on the roads of Lahore. He invited over young Baloch students who told us how they were pressured by the staff of their educational institutes. He took up cudgels for Sarmad Khoosat's film, Zindagi Tamasha, when it ran into trouble with the righteous lot. Detractors say he cherry-picked issues and left out X,Y,Z but at least A, B, C got highlighted. And in Pakistan, every little bit matters.

In all of this, he was supported by the rest of the committee. Most people on the Senate human rights committee seemed to feel equally strongly about such issues. But times have changed; parliament is now a sideshow, and human rights have always been one.

And so it seems we are going back to normal — in the dust kicked up by the Senate elections in March, Khokhar's relationship with his party leadership was also a casualty. Even before the Senate committees were finalised, few expected him back.

But what we didn't expect was that the committee would go back to the government because the PML-N exchanged it for defence!

Senior members of the Senate say that the human rights committee traditionally goes to the opposition, while defence goes to the government. Yet this time around, the Ganges is flowing in reverse but no one has any answers.

From the PPP, Senator Sherry Rehman is the only one who has bothered to offer some explanation. "Lot of opposition to PPP holding chair of HR in both houses so it [chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Human Rights] was given to PML N. But after N traded it for defence directly [with] Govt, Sen Reza Rabbani and I spent the whole day trying to get the committee back from Govt in a trade for IPC [Interprovincial Committee] once N had given it to them. But told no."

The government is probably relieved that the committee will no longer be embarrassing them for its poor human rights record.

The PML-N is quiet. Not a peep from them, even if asked. The party can hold forth eight hours a day on all things principled such as 'vote ko izzat do' and an executive's constitutional rights but it has offered no explanation for choosing defence over human rights. Perhaps, it is going to use this platform to point the guns at its chosen enemy or to underline its pragmatism. We don't know and neither do we know if this exchange was a party decision or the choice of a lone ranger. Mushahid Hussain is now heading the defence committee.

But to be fair, the PML-N is not alone in its disinterest.

A cursory glance at the channels over the weekend showed the usual debates. The growth rate, the politics of the opposition and who said what and what it could have meant — all the usual masala was there but little about this small, side story about a Senate committee.

And in this silence lies the real story about how important human rights are to us, as a people. No wonder, the previous Senate committee and its proceedings may end up as an aberration. The short story some of us will remember while the majority is transfixed by the saga about elections, the establishment, growth rates and other hefty themes. Perhaps the big shots feel that once the saga ends in a happily ever after, the short story will also, automatically, get a happy ending.

The writer is a journalist.

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## The climate crisis

By **Jamil Ahmad**

A TRIPLE planetary emergency is compounding poverty, leading to economic instability, exacerbating food insecurity and threatening our health. Most of all, it is affecting the poor. Climate change, nature loss and pollution are a trio that poses an existential threat to the planet.

Global warming results in extreme weather events, such as cyclones, droughts, extreme heat and wildfires. They strike with greater intensity and less predictability. A recent UNEP report, *Making Peace with Nature*, shows how humanity has — in the words of Secretary General António Guterres — “left the planet broken” and gives a blueprint for government action, as well as the needed engagement from businesses, civil society and individuals to address these emergencies. Fresh scientific evidence tells us of the impact of the triple emergency of climate change, nature loss and pollution, in line with warnings from other scientific bodies on climate and the environment. These planetary crises are showing no signs of subsiding.

Internationally agreed goals and targets on climate change, biodiversity and pollution are very ambitious and aspirational. Countries have approved national legislations, established new structures and initiated collaborative actions in line with their treaty obligations. However, recent years have witnessed several major environmental goals being missed by large margins, notwithstanding the high level of commitment regularly exhibited for treaties on climate and environment. A case in point of such failure are the Aichi Biodiversity Targets which missed the 2020 deadline, leaving the earth’s marine ecosystems in an extremely fragile state. The Paris climate agreement will falter too if countries do not ramp up their national contributions.

So why are these efforts falling short? Why is the planetary emergency continuing to grow when so much political will is on display? Why are environmental treaties and agreements bedevilled by a serious implementation deficit?

Multiple reasons are cited. Low-income countries ascribe their weak compliance with agreed goals to insufficient technical and financial resources. They also point out the unmet promises of development partners of financial support and transferring appropriate technologies. In the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit, high-income countries pledged to jointly mobilise \$100 billion a year by 2020 to assist low-income countries in addressing climate change. That pledge was then extended through 2025. Despite measures taken by several high-income countries, they have not even reached the \$80bn mark yet.

Other misplaced priorities of some rich countries are further deepening the gap in climate finance. Unfair subsidies for fossil fuels and agriculture worth hundreds of billion of dollars, as well as restrictive policies on the transfer of appropriate technologies to poor

nations, are among the factors that exacerbate the triple planetary emergency. These are worrying signs as we move to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and a carbon neutral-world by 2050.

Yet we need to go beyond ringing the alarm bells. By shifting to renewable energies, both large and small economies can decarbonise. The economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic offers an opportunity for moving away from a carbon-intense industry to investments in green technologies, even if the signals so far are not encouraging — an analysis of 50 leading economies by UNEP and the Oxford University Economic Recovery Project found that since the onset of the pandemic, nations were badly lagging in their commitment to invest sustainably in recovery.

Strenuous endeavours will be required to reverse negative trends in the short time that we have. Major economies have the chief responsibility to create enabling conditions and lead by example. Restructuring economies on a path to sustainability would require the involvement of all stakeholders. A breakthrough in climate finance and adaptation will only be possible through collective action by governments, the private sector, business and communities. A crucial step for governments would be to put a price on carbon and redirect huge subsidies from fossil fuels to renewables and nature-based solutions. The UN chief has urged the world to make this a decade of transformation and translate commitments into concrete and immediate action. By opting for green recovery plans of economies, this transformation can be expedited.

The good news is that much can be done to tackle the triple environmental threat we are facing. Science has clearly identified options and mustering the political will to do that is in every citizen's hands. We have another opportunity to revitalise our commitments to a sustainable future.

*The writer is director of intergovernmental affairs,  
United Nations Environment Programme.*

## Strategic depth for a peaceful Afghanistan

By **Kashif Mirza**

Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that the ruling PTI had changed Pakistan's decades-long policy of pushing for strategic depth in Afghanistan to ensure that there was a friendly government there. The government wants to build a domestic consensus on its policy on Afghanistan.

However, this is easier said than done in the politically polarised environment, especially in the presence of Indian influence and network. If the situation worsens after the withdrawal of US troops, Pakistan may face a volatile situation that will have a direct impact on all aspects of life, including politics. There is a belief that Pakistan's support to Afghan Pashtuns is aimed at finding a counterweight to the nationalists who interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs and challenge the legality of the border.

Afghanistan has been mired in chaos and misery over the past 20 years. The war has killed at least 100,000 civilians and left the country's political and economic systems in dire straits. The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan is expected to be completed much before the September 11 deadline. Over the past two decades, US troops and those of its allies were sent to Afghanistan to support Afghanistan's public security and during this process, it tried to cultivate a pro-USA regime, but this was totally a failure. The withdrawal of troops at this time shows that the USA has realized its Afghan policy is a failure.

Since last month, at least seven other districts have also fallen to the Taliban, two of them close to the capital city, Kabul, in the Maidan Wardak province. The UN's human rights agency and its assistance mission in the country said that there was a disturbing spike in civilian deaths, with 3,035 fatalities and 5,785 injuries registered in 2020. The Taliban have carried out a string of attacks near vulnerable provincial capitals across Afghanistan since May 1, when the withdrawal process for the nearly 3,000 US-led foreign troops began, which is a sign that the Taliban is assessing the government's capacity to safeguard the country once the withdrawal process is completed. It is believed that 50 percent of the area of Afghanistan is currently under the control of the Taliban, 30 percent under government control and the remaining 20 percent is hotly contested between the two. The Taliban are now an internationally recognised entity. All countries in the region are therefore trying to establish some form of relations with them realising that they will be major players in any future Afghan set-up. Moreover, the Taliban are believed to have around 100,000 trained fighters in their ranks. They have also formed a shadow government.

Unfortunately, the peace talks have hit an impasse for a number of reasons. The Taliban say they do not want US surveillance aircraft to be flying over their territory but the USA maintains these flights will continue. Taliban insist all their 7000 prisoners should be released but the Afghan government says it will not order the release till the Taliban reduce the level of violence. The USA says Taliban should break all ties with Al-Qaeda and other militants and agree to become part of a future Afghan government, but the Taliban have flatly refused to participate in any such set-up with President Ashraf Ghani. The USA wants a safe and respectable withdrawal without a perception of defeat, and a broad-based political settlement in Kabul leading to an inclusive government. The USA has about 20 bases in the Middle East region and wants to retain some foothold in the region. At the same time, it also wants to move more resources to the Western Pacific region and focus on strategic competition with China.

In comparison to irresponsible US deeds, China underlines that the Afghan issue can only be resolved by political means and the future of Afghanistan should be left in the hands of the Afghan people.

The people of Afghanistan are going through a lot of fear about what may lie in the near future for them in the wake of pending Taliban rule. The fear is that if a negotiated settlement is not reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban— and the indications are not too promising so far— then there are chances that Afghanistan could slide into yet another civil war.

This would have an adverse impact on the region and especially on Pakistan. A fresh influx of refugees into Pakistan is one likelihood. This will exacerbate the burden that Pakistan is already bearing due to the very large refugee presence in the country. A civil war in Afghanistan could have a spillover effect and regenerate violence and militancy in the border areas. This would mean immense economic pressure on Pakistan, which is already struggling to cope with a faltering economy left weaker by the covid-19 pandemic.

In these circumstances, the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Afghanistan should form inclusive political arrangements to make sure that all ethnic groups and parties can participate in political life in the future and enjoy equal political rights. The Afghan national governance structure in the future should conform to the country's national conditions and development needs.

The international community should make a due contribution to the final resolution of the Afghan issue, and should also play its due role for the long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan stands ready to continue working with regional countries and the international community to move the peace and reconciliation process forward, and help Afghanistan realize peace and stability at an early date.

PM Imran Khan's assertion that Pakistan wants to avoid intervention and will respect whichever government the Afghan people elect to power sounds a sensible strategy, but it may be prudent for the government, and for the establishment that continues to have

the dominant role in policy on Afghanistan, to make an extra effort to bring all political stakeholders on board and forge a consensus— however loose— on the core policy to deal with the swiftly evolving situation across the western border. This is a lesson worth learning from the history of the past four decades. Pakistan needs to re-evaluate and upgrade its policy of strategic depth for peaceful Afghanistan, as a peaceful Afghanistan means peace in Pakistan.

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## Afghanistan on the edge again

By **Maleeha Lodhi**

WITH the closing act of the American military withdrawal well underway the situation in Afghanistan is at an inflection point. Fast-moving events on the ground are outpacing efforts to ensure an orderly transition to a post-America political dispensation there. Intense uncertainty clouds the country's future as concern grows in Pakistan and elsewhere about the increasing danger of its slide into chaos. Prime Minister Imran Khan's comments in an interview last week are the latest expression of those fears.

While the US pullout is proceeding ahead of schedule the Afghan peace process remains in a state of deadlock and there is a significant surge in violence. Another complicating factor injected into an already fraught situation is the cooling in relations between Islamabad and Kabul.

There is no indication that the US-orchestrated international peace conference in Istanbul aimed to accelerate the intra-Afghan dialogue will take place anytime soon. The UN was supposed to convene the meeting in late April but efforts to persuade the Taliban to attend have so far come to naught.

While the political stalemate continues, the US withdrawal has picked up pace. There are credible reports that Washington wants to accelerate the withdrawal to mitigate the risk to its troops and complete the pullout by early or mid-July rather than the September deadline announced by President Joe Biden. Nato forces are also said to be working on a July deadline with the drawdown proceeding accordingly.

This should lend urgency to diplomatic efforts for peace talks to make progress towards a political settlement. So far, despite some interaction between the Afghan negotiating delegations in Doha, the intra-Afghan process has all but come to a halt. What has not ceased is fighting between Afghan National Security Forces and the Taliban. Violence has intensified and US airpower has had to come to the aid of ANSF in several places especially in the south. US/Nato air support remains critical to Kabul's ability to withstand rising military pressure from the Taliban, who have however abided — so far — by the agreement not to attack foreign forces.

US and Pakistani efforts to persuade the Taliban to agree to a reduction in violence have met with little success. Washington sought this as a necessary accompaniment to the peace plan it outlined a few months ago. But the Taliban offensive has made it evident that they are not prepared to give up an option that aims to bolster their negotiating position and test Kabul's strength. Their stance remains that the reduction of violence and a ceasefire have to emerge from intra-Afghan talks and not before. Hopes that by the beginning of June some reduction of violence would be achieved remain unfulfilled, for now.

A top Pakistani official has been in Doha to persuade the Taliban to show flexibility and resume the intra-Afghan dialogue and reduce violence. But the Taliban don't seem to be in a mood to listen at a time when Pakistan's leverage has been diminishing. The Taliban have been urged to put their peace plan on the table, but again, there is no sign of this. US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is soon expected in the region for another round of shuttle diplomacy in a last-ditch effort to achieve these goals.

The Taliban argue that their demands for the release of their prisoners and de-listing from the UN sanctions regime have yet to be met and for which they await a response. They also say that attending a peace conference without knowing what obligations they will be expected to undertake would place them in an unacceptable position. They have reportedly indicated conditional acceptance to join the conference in Turkey provided they know in advance what will happen as they won't sign up to anything pre-cooked.

This may be a pretext to buy time and wait it out for US troops to depart especially as the Taliban see themselves in an ascendent position. Taliban leaders also continue to signal that they will not yield on their insistence that the future Afghanistan should be an Islamic emirate and not a republic. Their position on core issues seems to have hardened as the American withdrawal has entered its end phase. Nevertheless, they continue to want to preserve the international legitimacy they secured since the Doha agreement with the US. This however has not deterred the Taliban from ramping up attacks across the country despite international appeals to de-escalate violence. Their strategy seems to be to encircle provincial capitals and seek to choke several key routes to set the stage for the siege of cities later. Nine districts have already been captured. Defections from Afghan forces at the local level are aiding them in this strategy. The inevitable question this raises is how far ANSF will be able to sustain itself once international forces leave Afghanistan and they are bereft of crucial air cover.

Against this backdrop, the downturn in relations between Islamabad and Kabul has come at a delicate time. Despite Pakistan's efforts to strengthen ties with President Ashraf Ghani's government, as reflected most recently in army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa's May visit to Kabul, two developments have set back relations between the two countries. Ghani's gratuitously provocative remarks against Pakistan in an interview with Der Spiegel and his national security adviser, Hamdullah Mohib's incendiary comments — just days after Gen Bajwa's visit.

This led to cancellation of a phone conversation planned between Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Ghani. It also put on ice a statement Islamabad was to issue supportive of the Afghan republic's position on preserving the gains of the last 20 years in Afghanistan and protection of human rights.

Against the backdrop of intensified fighting, lack of movement on a political settlement and the remaining American soldiers packing up to leave, the spectre that looms in Afghanistan is of chaos and more strife and anarchy. This has grave implications for

Pakistan who for decades has suffered the destabilising consequences of war, foreign interventions and conflict in its western neighbor. The question now is whether anything can be done to avert a 1989 or 1992 type scenario in Afghanistan, which can have such deleterious repercussions for its long-suffering people and for regional peace and stability.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK & UN.

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## Pakistan's Afghan predicament

By **Zahid Hussain**

WITH the American forces racing to the exit, Afghanistan has further descended into chaos. There is an element of inevitability about the unfolding situation. The power vacuum widened by the withdrawal of foreign forces has encouraged the Afghan Taliban to accelerate their military offensive.

Heavy casualties suffered by the Afghan government forces in recent days underscore the fierceness of the insurgents' assault. Fierce fighting is going on in 26 of the 34 provinces. With no sign of the two warring sides reaching a negotiated political settlement there seems little possibility of cessation of hostilities.

The growing violence threatens to push Afghanistan into a new civil war with serious consequences for the region. The deteriorating situation across the border has also worsened Pakistan's predicament as the country is caught in the midst of a geopolitical crisis. It faces multiple security and foreign policy challenges with the threat of the Afghan conflict spilling over to Pakistani soil.

Despite the apparent tightrope walking it will be hard for Islamabad to escape the fallout. One is, however, not sure whether our policymakers have a clear grasp of the seriousness of the situation and a clear strategy to deal with these challenges.

The Taliban's military success across the border is ominous for Pakistan's national security. It is bound to exacerbate this country's own problem of militancy in the border areas and religious extremism inside the country. Most perturbing is the report of transnational militant groups stepping up activities along the Pak-Afghan border regions.

In its latest report, the UN Security Council's Sanctions and Monitoring Committee warned that a significant part of the Al Qaeda leadership resides in the regions along the border with Pakistan, which have become the main centre of militant activities. The growing instability seems to have allowed various transnational militant groups greater space to operate in Afghanistan.

Most alarming is the escalation in the activities of the so-called Islamic State (IS) group. More than two dozen militant groups are reported to be active in the region including several factions of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The competition among them for territorial control makes the regional situation extremely volatile.

The Taliban's commitment that they would not allow any militant group to use Afghan soil for attacks on any country had cleared the way for the Doha accord that led to agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan. But the latest UN Security Council committee report alleging some faction of the group still maintains links

with Al Qaeda has raised questions about the Taliban sticking to the agreement. The Taliban have rejected the report as "based on false information".

But the relentless violence involving transnational militant groups such as IS has raised serious concerns over the post-US withdrawal situation in Afghanistan. Most of the recent attacks have targeted civilian populations. Dozens of students were killed in an IS-claimed attack on a school in Kabul last month.

More disturbing for Pakistan is the report of splinter TTP groups based across the border in Afghanistan being reunited, backed by some transnational militant groups. The development has led to an increase in cross-border attacks in the former tribal districts, particularly in North Waziristan where Pakistan's control remains tenuous.

Such attacks have become increasingly frequent in other northwestern border regions also with the growing instability in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban's strengthening its military control across the border may give a boost to their supporters among right-wing groups in Pakistan.

Pakistan has long been a haven for Afghan Taliban fighting the occupation forces that had given Islamabad some leverage to bring the insurgent group to sit across the negotiating table with American officials. But that clout seems to have diminished with the exit of the American forces.

The Taliban's refusal to join the proposed US-sponsored intra-Afghan talks in Istanbul and agree to a reduction in violence have also cast a shadow over the already tense relations between Islamabad and Kabul. Afghan government leaders have publicly accused Pakistan of aiding the Taliban's offensive.

Some of the comments emanating from Kabul are outright abusive and have crossed all diplomatic norms. This hostile attitude of the Afghan government has complicated the situation further for Pakistan. The outburst of the Pakistani foreign minister in response to the Afghan national security chief's anti-Pakistan comments should have been avoided. The point should have been made when a foreign ministry spokesman said that Pakistan would not interact with the Afghan national security adviser who is notorious for using undiplomatic language.

It is apparent that the American exit plan has been as chaotic as its invasion of Afghanistan was some 20 years ago. There was no clear objective when the world's most powerful superpower went to war and 20 years later it's leaving Afghanistan in a greater mess with warring Afghan groups fighting for domination.

Many analysts see the present Afghan situation as a return to the late 1980s after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. The looming civil war could have been avoided if the Americans had shown greater seriousness in getting a political settlement in place. But it's too late now.

The Biden administration is reportedly thinking of a US intelligence presence for counterterrorism action. A report published in the New York Times reveals that the US is

already engaged in negotiations with Pakistan and some other regional countries for a base for the CIA surveillance operation.

Interestingly, there has not been any denial from Pakistani officials of the reported negotiations. Although Pakistani leaders have categorically said that no US military base will be allowed, the report suggested that Pakistan could agree to give the US access to some facilities. The provision of any such facility even with conditions attached would pull Pakistan into a deeper quandary.

Pakistan needs to tread a very cautious path with the threat of Afghan civil war extended to its own territory. It could have more serious repercussions for our national security than in the past. The horror of the past four decades of conflict in Afgh-a-nistan continues to haunt the entire region.

*The writer is the author of No-Win War — The Paradox of US-Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan's Shadow.*

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# How India exploited Afghanistan against Pakistan

## The exploitation must end

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By **Naveed Khan**

India and Pakistan are the two rival nuclear States of South Asia. Right from their inceptions, they did not have friendly bilateral relations. They fought three major wars and had been in military standoffs a few times. India has always tried to destabilize Pakistan economically, politically and militarily to become the regional power of south Asia. For this purpose India found another country, Afghanistan, which bears ill will towards Pakistan due to some of its issues, like the Durand Line, and others, with Pakistan. Afghanistan is a landlocked country of south Asia and always had a significant place in global politics due to its strategic and economic importance as it has been considered a bridge to the oil and gas trade route and a gateway to the central Asian market.

On the other hand, India and Afghanistan had friendly relations throughout history. India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The relation received a massive blow when the Afghan civil war started after the Soviet departure from Afghanistan in 1989 onwards. The Taliban government did not maintain strong relations with India, as during the Taliban regime the Hindus were being watched keenly in Afghanistan. India was involved in building the infrastructure in Afghanistan since 1980. When Taliban took control, this aid was halted. When the Taliban were ruling, they seemed the perfect partners for Pakistan both politically and militarily. That Pro-Pakistani attitude of the Afghan Taliban was pinching India.

Now when the US and allied forces invaded Afghanistan and removed the Taliban regime, after the 9/11 attacks, a global war on terror was declared by the USA. This major strategic shift set a perfect ground for India to become the strong ally of Afghanistan as the Taliban were thrown away. The Afghan elite leadership believed that Pakistan brought the Taliban into power and then toppled them down again by collaborating with the USA. After the Taliban's dismissal, Hamid Karzai became President of Afghanistan, who hated Pakistan because he was of the view that Pakistani spy agency ISI had killed his father in 1999. He also had some emotional bond with India as he received his masters education from India. When Karzai was interviewed at some point, he considered India as the perfect partner for Afghanistan. He called India a democratic, stable, economically rich country and the best friend of Afghanistan. This was a perfect platform for India to invest in Afghanistan and achieve its strategic and economic goals.

During Karzai's government India reopened its embassy and four consulates in Afghanistan to increase its influence there. India provided some \$1.5 billion aid for the

rebuilding of Afghanistan in the post-Taliban era and promised to invest about \$500 million in the near future. India gained the trust of Afghans because of all its efforts to rebuild Afghanistan and succeeded in increasing its influence in Afghanistan and minimizing Pakistan's influence there. During this time India constructed a negative image of Pakistan. Apart from this, Afghanistan's elites always blamed Pakistan for the destruction of the country and for providing support and safe haven to the Afghan Taliban. Afghanistan also rejects the Durand Line; and claims that the Pashtoon-dominated areas of Pakistan belong to Afghanistan. These misperceptions brought Afghanistan to build stronger ties with India.

India has its own strategic and economic interests in Afghanistan for which they are investing ample resources. Their strategic interests include, to conduct covert operations against Pakistan using Afghan soil, to keep eye on Jihadist Islamic Groups; who are fighting in Indian-occupied Kashmir, to minimize Pakistan's and the Taliban's influence in Afghanistan, and to support separatist and militant groups like BLA in Pakistan, The economic interests include getting access to central Asia for trade.

India projected its image as a true helper, but as realists say there is no permanent friend and no permanent enemy in international relations, what matters are the states' interests. India, too, was making all efforts to achieve its own aims. India also exploited the Afghan refugees in Pakistan with the help of NDS, by using them in funding militant organizations and carrying out terrorist attacks in Pakistan. That's how India took the advantage of the lack of cultural, social and political connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan and exploited Afghans.

Pakistan needs to tackle this issue wisely. Pakistan is also playing a vital role in peace talks between Taliban and the USA. It needs to regain the trust of Afghans by cooperating with the Afghan government politically and economically. Pakistan should also make strong military relations with Afghanistan in order to oust the threatening Indian influence from Afghanistan. Pakistan should strengthen its bilateral relations with Afghanistan as Pakistan cannot afford to have same enemy at multiple fronts.

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# Indian stance on Kashmir repudiated

## The UNGA President showed up India

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By **Malik Muhammad Ashraf**

UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir, addressing a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood on the conclusion of his visit to Pakistan, said, "I think it is the duty, especially Pakistan's, to bring the Kashmir issue to the United Nation platform more strongly". He also reiterated that all parties should refrain from changing the status of Jammu and Kashmir, as the solution was to be found through peaceful means in accordance with the UN charter and UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions as agreed in the Simla Agreement between Pakistan and India.

However, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Baghchi said, "His remarks that Pakistan is 'duty bound' to raise this issue in the UN more strongly are unacceptable. Nor indeed is there any basis for comparison to other global situations." Deputy Spokesperson of the UNGA President, Amy Quantrill, referring to the Indian reaction said, "The President was saddened to see a press statement from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, which portrays his remarks on Jammu and Kashmir from a selective perspective, while they are consistent with the longstanding UN position regarding this issue."

What the UNGA President said in the press conference and in regards to Indian reaction was an unequivocal repudiation of the Indian stance on Kashmir and reaffirmation of the fact that it was an international issue waiting to be resolved in consonance with UN resolutions. He also explicitly rejected the Indian action to end the special status of Kashmir, its annexation to the Indian Union and moves to change demographic features of the state through the promulgation of a new domicile law.

Indian actions are not only a blatant violation of the UNSC resolutions but also a breach of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. The foreign minister was right on the money while saying, "Pay attention. These are international obligations. The UN must play that role of responsibility which is due. The Kashmir dispute is a reality and no one can deny it or remove it from the UNSC agenda."

The resolution of the Kashmir dispute, as pointed out by the foreign minister, is the responsibility of the UN. But it is regrettable that in spite of the acknowledgement of the dispute no credible action has been initiated for the implementation of the UN resolutions. The UNSC in its three informal meetings in the backdrop of annexation of the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir also reiterated that the Kashmir dispute must be resolved in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and the relevant resolutions.

The UN Secretary General has also repeatedly emphasized this fact. While these statements are welcome, the fact is that mere statements are not going to dissuade India from what it is doing and also to nudge it towards the solution of this festering dispute. It needs UN intervention in regards to implementation of the UNSC resolutions. Indian actions besides being illegal also constitute an affront to the world body and the international community.

India has been hiding behind Simla Agreement to claim that the Kashmir issue was a bilateral issue between Pakistan and India and therefore Pakistan could not internationalize it, notwithstanding the fact that the Agreement reiterates that the relations between the two countries would be governed by the UN Charter. The bilateral mechanism surely did not obviate the possibility of Pakistan taking the issue to the UN. Article 103 of UN Charter says "In the event of a conflict between the obligations of the members of the UN under the present charter and their obligations under any other international agreement, their obligations under the present charter will prevail." What it means is that the UN resolutions on Kashmir will take precedence over all other international agreements on the same issue. So Pakistan is very much within its right to invoke the UN resolutions, after having been frustrated in finding a solution through the bilateral arrangement.

Forty-eight years have gone by since the signing of the Simla Agreement, but India has never shown any seriousness in resolving the Kashmir issue and every time an opportunity for a dialogue was created, it wriggled out of it on one pretext or the other. Indian evasiveness in resolving the issue forced the people of Kashmir to launch a freedom struggle in 1989 which continues even after 5 August 2019 with greater intensity. Indian action has also jeopardized peace and security in the region about which Pakistan has repeatedly warned the UN and the world community. Kashmir is admittedly a nuclear flash point. It was about time for the UN and the world community to pay attention to it before it is too late.

As suggested by President of UN General Assembly, Pakistan should re-raise the Kashmir issue at the UN forum more vigorously to invoke the UNSC resolutions. India should not be allowed to get away with its unilateral and illegal action in Indian-Held Kashmir. The diplomatic offensive launched by Pakistan in the wake of the 5 August 2019 action by India and subsequent steps did achieve tremendous success as the international community did not buy the Indian argument that it was her internal issue. The international media also played a significant role in reiterating that stance and highlighting the miserable situation of the Kashmiris and the abuse of human rights by the Indian security forces.

The situation is ripe for building pressure on India to rescind the actions taken in Indian-Held Kashmir and pushing her towards finding a solution to the dispute. Nonetheless the

greater responsibility lies with the UNSC, the UN Secretary General and the President of the General Assembly to move beyond statements.

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