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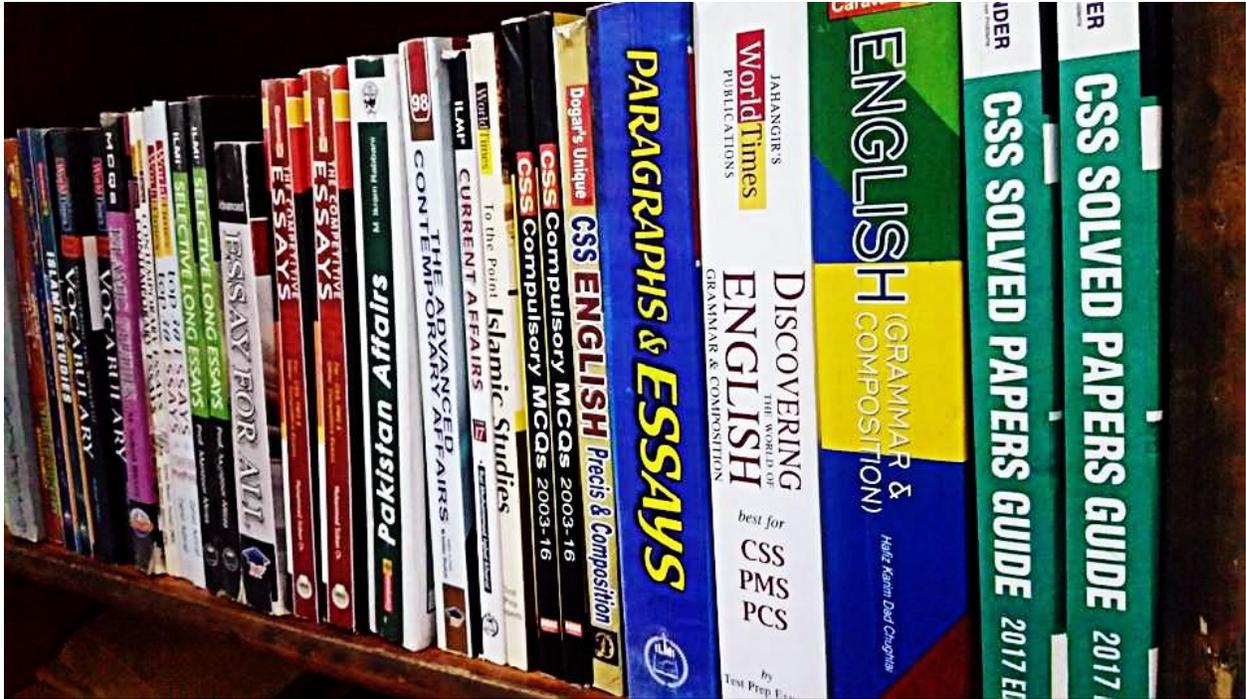
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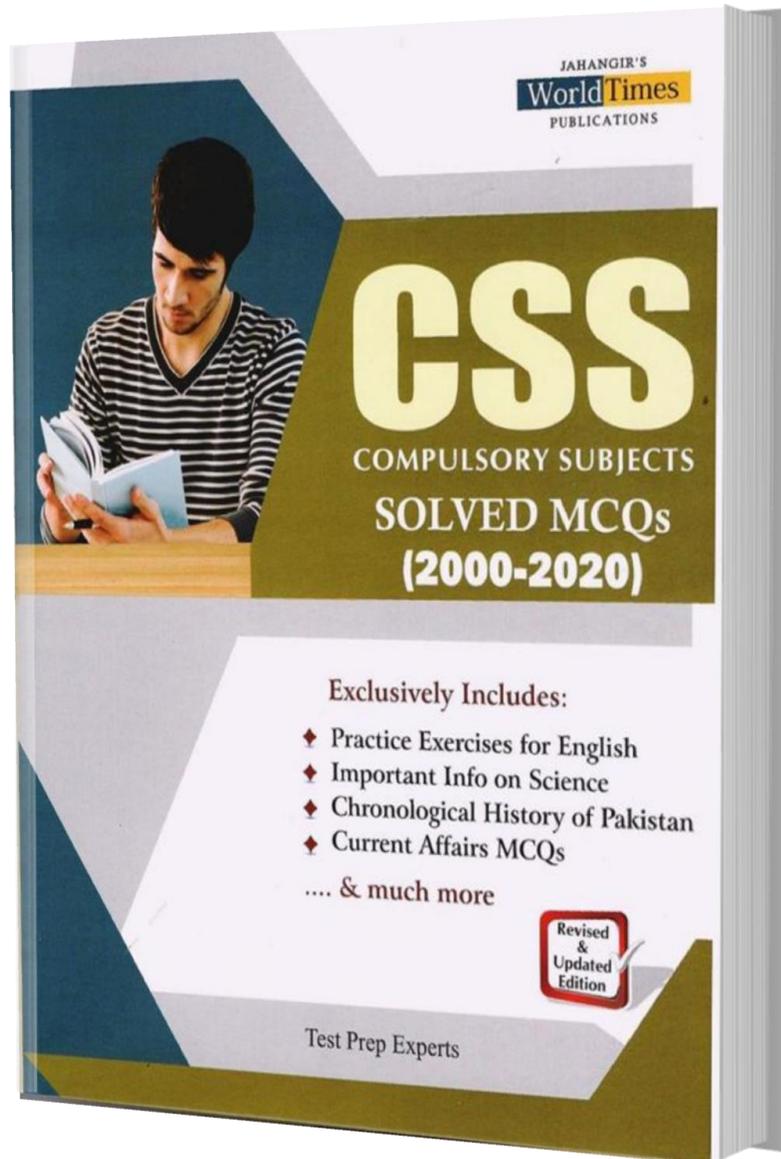
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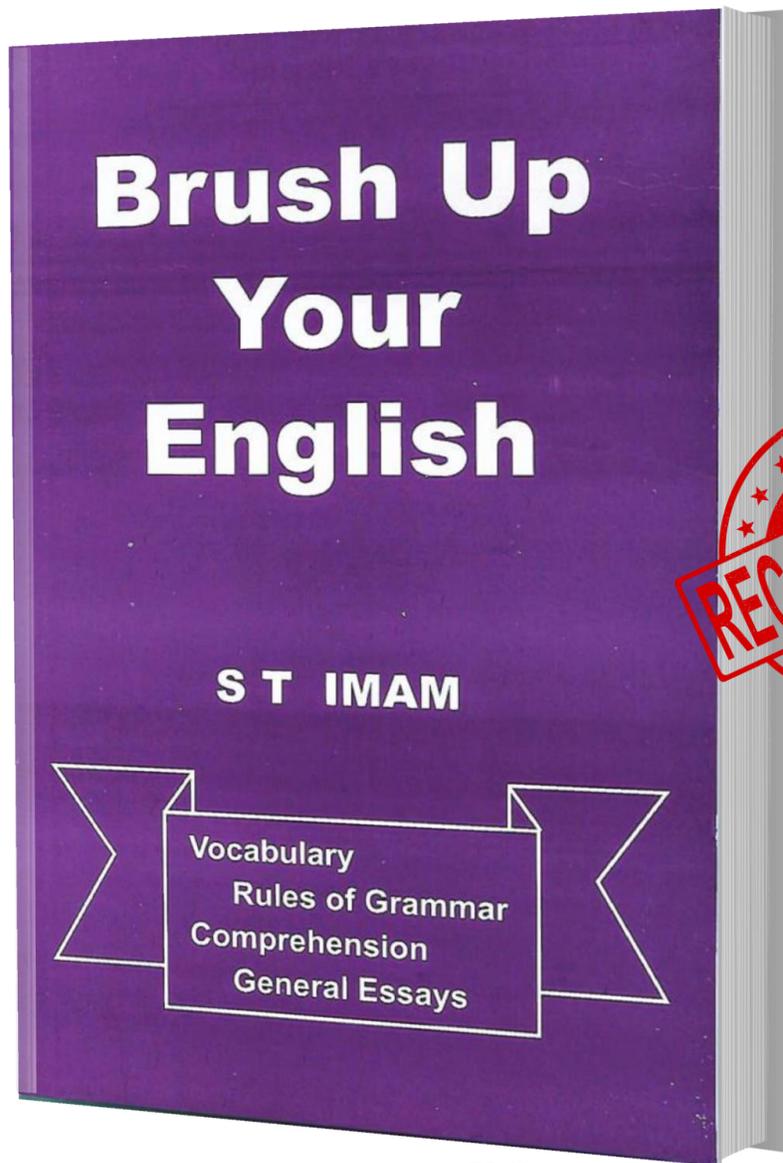


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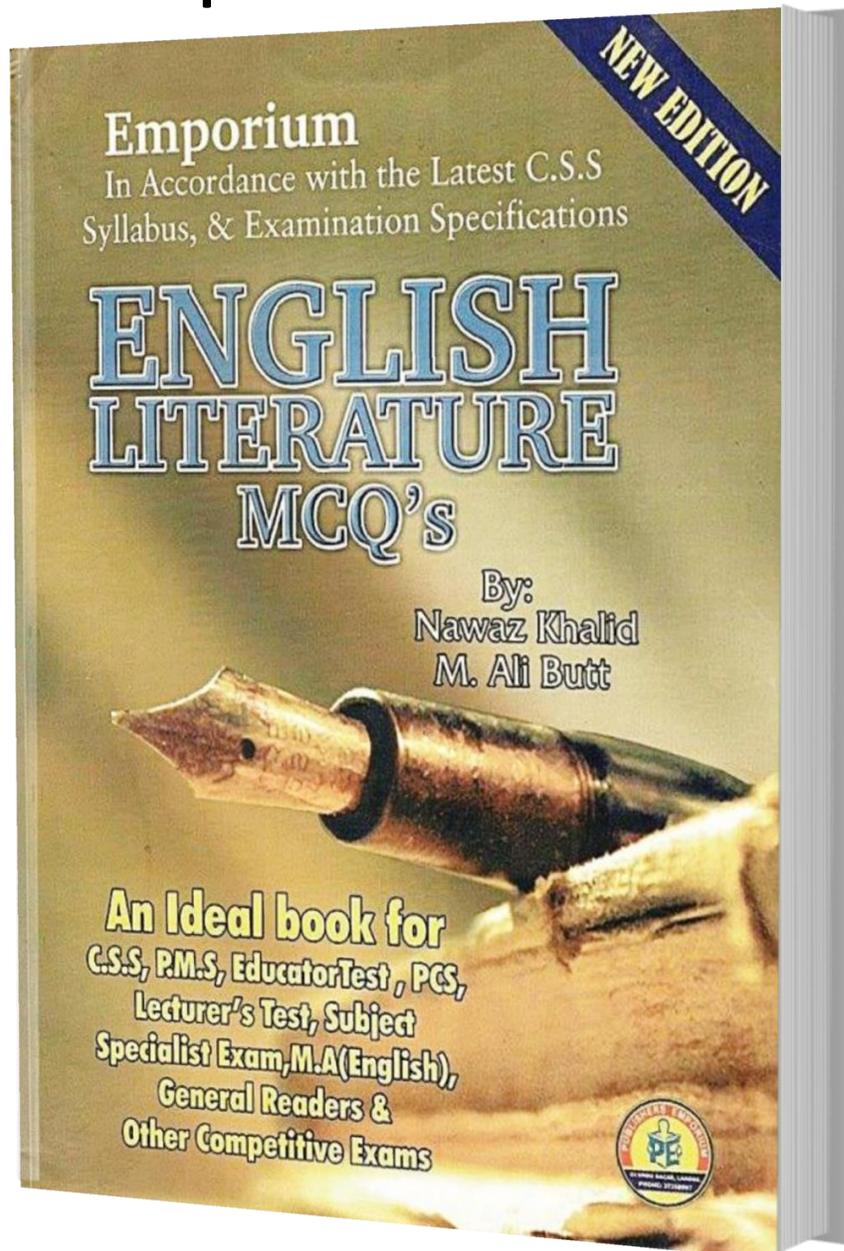
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# PAKISTAN

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## **Modi, Trump and Imran Khan: Challenges at home and abroad** **Muhammad Jahangir Kakar**

It is spring sprouting all around for Pakistan and the vivid show of the silver lining on the horizons of international relations. The Modi saga of international diplomacy is seized to the double strife of CAA and NRC which are tearing India apart into communal violence which does not seem pausing in any near future. Deteriorating image of India: Prospects for Pakistan

The Trump's disgruntle of Modi's wish casting Pakistan as terror manufacturing country and Pakistan's aggrandized responsibility in the US-Taliban Peace deal and its critical role in intra Afghan talks cultivate ever so fertile grounds for Pakistan in making land sliding diplomatic makeovers.

The success of tapping these opportunities would rely heavily on the government's ability of manoeuvring home politics though some political give and takes as to be all attentive to seizing the seas of diplomatic opportunities which time and space has offered Pakistan at these fateful crossroads of time.

So long as Modi was not perturbed by homegrown issues, as during his first tenure, he championed the art of Governance both at home and abroad. Politics is an art of flexibilities and not departures from ideas and the government must realize the big international gains and must not compromise them at the expense of petty internal political gains.

We must learn from the bigot Modi in our neighbourhood. So long as Modi was not perturbed by homegrown issues, as during his first tenure, he championed the art of Governance both at home and abroad.

With the innate material of utmost bigotry which Modi is wholly made up of, he came to materialize his wildest ever dreams of 'Hinduising' anything and

everything through his ill placed and ill-timed Citizenship Amendment Act which is now turning out to be his ultimate political death.

This provided the opportunity for both the opposition and the liberal Indians to openly draw antagonistic parallels with Modi. So, there is the glorious liberal India today fondling itself through the ashes of communal polarization.

Caught amidst such quagmire, Modi hardly can look up anything other than domestic issues. He is getting denser into this communal swamp which is burying the liberal India. Moral: Always keep your home in order.

The internal political skirmishes would down tone the sublime international political and diplomatic buoyancy especially at such a time when there are liberal opportunities for Pakistan to explore and excel foreign relations as becoming a significant political agent to Asia and the world.

The Trump's stirring support of Pakistan at such elemental time holds a serious geo-political meaning. Trump is heavily relying on Pakistan in giving USA a safe and honourable exit from Afghanistan with the assurance that Afghan affairs are left to Afghans without any political manoeuvres from Pakistan as practiced in the past.

Source : <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/modi-trump-and-imran-khan-challenges-at-home-and-abroad/?fbclid=IwAR0IJAOLXyFEt-gm5NmUyIvFiEZGMV4zEP59CO4ZKnejr86Ibn7-2ZKo5co>

## **Extension in GSP Plus By Malik Ashraf**

ADVISER to Prime Minister on Commerce, Industry and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood in a tweet on Friday revealed that the European Commission has extended GSP Plus status for Pakistan till 2022 which would allow duty free access of Pakistani goods, especially textiles into 27 member countries of the EU. That indeed is a very positive and encouraging development as the countries of the European Union are the biggest market for our textile and garments and a major sources of foreign exchange earnings. Our textile and garment industries besides earning foreign exchange also provide job opportunities for our ever increasing labour force, especially women. According to reliable sources since the grant of GSP Plus to Pakistan in 2014, our exports to European Union have increased from 4.538 billion Euros in 2013 to 7.492 billion Euros in 2019, registering an increase of 65 percent. The extension in the GSP Plus comes in the wake of the European Commission report on the implementation of 27 international conventions by Pakistan. The report particularly appreciated and expressed satisfaction on the progress made in regards to areas of climate change, forestation under billion tree tsunami project, improved vigilance to combat illicit narcotics and wildlife trade, political and administrative reforms to integrate erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), social protection initiatives like Ehasas Programme, promotion of Inter-Faith Harmony including opening of Kartarpur Corridor and legislation to ensure the rights of women, children and transgender.

The 3rd Biennial Assessment of GSP was published by the European Commission on February 10, 2020. As per GSP Regulations, the Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) has to submit a report to the European Parliament and European Council on the performance of GSP Scheme and the status of compliance of GSP beneficiary countries on the 27 international conventions covered under the Regulation. The report was discussed in the International Trade (INTA) Committee of EU Parliament on 19 February 2020 and in the GSP Working Party of the European Council on 26 February 2020. The European Commission and External Action Service recommended at both the forums to continue GSP Scheme and stated their monitoring priorities for the next biennial monitoring cycle. Other countries which also have been given this facility include Armenia, Bolivia, Cape Verde, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Philippines and Sri Lanka. The federal government, provincial governments and the

concerned ministries and departments under them deserve accolades for making concerted efforts in regards to the implementation of the international conventions essential for claiming the GSP Plus status. In this regard the visionary Ehsas Programme launched by the PTI government under the stewardship of Prime Minister Imran Khan which is purported to eliminate poverty, empowerment of women and loans to youth for starting their own businesses, has received great appreciation by the European Commission.

As they say the credit must be given where it lies. The PTI government has not only taken imaginative and pragmatic initiatives to stem the rot in the economy but has also put in place unprecedented measures to change the fortunes of the less-privileged sections of the society through the multi-dimensional Ehsas initiative. It is pertinent to point out that the status of GSP Plus beneficiary granted to Pakistan by EU has not come only through the implementation of the international conventions but also by intensive lobbying by the Pakistani embassies in the EU countries, Ministry of Commerce and the government of Pakistan at the highest level. The extension in the GSP Plus status has provided yet another opportunity to our business community and industrialists to make their contribution to the much needed enhancement in our export as they are considered to be the biggest propeller of any economy. The concession given by EU would provide necessary props for the efforts of the PTI government to revive the economy, through export-led growth, which forms the pivot of its economic strategy. It is likely to spur economic activity within country besides creating millions of new jobs.

The grant of GSP Plus to Pakistan besides representing success of the well coordinated diplomatic offensive of the government but also indicates the faith of the EU countries in the quality of our textile products. European Union is Pakistan's key partner in peace and development. The approval of the GSP Plus also reflects the commitment of the European Union to its relations with Pakistan. The country direly needed this preferential treatment as its textile products are still not competitive at the global level. It is like a whiff of fresh air for our strangulated economy. The endorsement by EU of the progress made Pakistan in regards to international conventions also goes a long way in improving the image of the country among the comity of nations. The GSP Plus Scheme was launched by EU in 1971 under which duty free import of goods from developing countries is allowed with the objective to nudge and encourage sustainable development and good governance in them. It is a kind of incentives arrangement for the developing countries. The beneficiaries are included in the

programme on the basis of having ratified and implemented 27 UN conventions regarding human rights, good governance and environment. Pakistan has already ratified those conventions and fulfilled other qualifying conditions. However, some key members of EU, including Germany, have been insisting on elimination of death penalty and child labour in Pakistan to support its bid for inclusion in the GSP.

— The writer is freelance columnist based in Islamabad.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/extension-in-gsp-plus/>

# **Coronavirus: what's next for Pakistan By Dr Rana Jawad Asghar**

It was a somber day yesterday as Pakistan doubled its reported cases of coronavirus from nine to 18 in a single day. Globally we passed the mark of 4,000 deaths out of the 115,000 cases. Where reported cases are declining in China the situation has reversed globally with around 34,000 cases and 900 deaths reported outside of China. The number of countries and territories infected has reached 115. These numbers are increasing by the day and are likely to change by the time this article will be published.

As soon as the coronavirus outbreak started, people, governments and especially companies with major investments around the world wanted to know how this virus behaves and what the projections for this pandemic are. Projection models are an important part of epidemiology so many researchers took the bite and published their estimates, which were as wild and diverse as 1% to a nearly 100% rate of infection. However, many projected the infection rate to be between 40-50%.

As someone working on pandemic preparedness, outbreak detection and response, I was also reached by many local and international organisations for an estimate. However, I refrained from getting into this race because this is an evolving disease and with so many unknowns, any modelling or estimate will be fundamentally faulty. Lots of information since then has now become public but answers to some basic questions remain unknown. Some of these include: what is the virus' death rate? Does it only spread through droplets? And how long does COVID-19 survive on the surface? Our control strategies are based on our experiences with other coronaviruses but each microorganism is unique and we need to understand it better to devise effective strategies.

Until now most countries were using "containment" strategies which mean controlling the importation of disease and strict isolation of already imported cases to prevent local transmission of cases. That is why we in Pakistan started enhanced airport and border health screenings. We shut down certain flights and borders for defined times. Even when done properly these measures do not ensure that no infected person enters the country. Quarantine was effective back

when most travel was by sea and it took weeks and months to reach the next port. Normally most infectious diseases start showing symptoms in two weeks' time or earlier. So doctors would board the ship and examine travellers for symptoms (plague and cholera in those times) and would then not allow the ship to dock. However, air travel means that we could be infected but will not show symptoms at the early stages of infection. Airport and border screenings serve as an important component of risk communication as travellers are supposed to report to health authorities if they get sick. The strict enforcement of the containment policy also buys the local health system some time to prepare for the crisis.

Once a certain threshold is passed and we start seeing more cases, mitigation strategies become effective. Global experts, including the WHO executive director, is raising the alarm that the world should get ready for an acceleration phase where we will see a rapid increase in the number of cases. Italy had just nine cases which surpassed 9,000 in two weeks' time. South Korea has also reported 7,500 cases in a short time period but it actively looked for cases. That is why its death rate at this moment is below 1% while Italy's is 5%. The important message from South Korea and Singapore is not to be afraid of the rise in the numbers of cases and actively look for them. If like Italy, cases start reporting themselves, then you have already lost the battle. In Pakistan too we should not be afraid if we see a rise in numbers as a result of enhanced surveillance and not the other way around.

Source : <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2173442/6-coronavirus-whats-next-pakistan-opinion/>

## **Pakistan's Governance System: Needs major repairs By Muhammad Jahangir Kakar**

Our governance system calls for major repairs than the recommendations such as curtailing the number of vacancies, introducing lateral inductions of specialists, rotation policy of assignments, increasing promotion threshold with performance indicators and mandatory retention review on qualifying twenty years of service and a little of professional acquisition of knowledge at the mid-career level.

It seems the pivot of all reform mechanism was the civil servants rather than the disgruntled public who are pissed off in this non-yielding and non-responsive spinning governance design structured chiefly by the forces of status quo.

We need to study our governance system through adopting scientific means, methods and models to diagnose the ailments properly to only be able to treat them properly rather than applying treatment based on prescriptive knowledge on the explodes of some personality cults.

We must be careful while being reformers as acting in the godly manner where we may be creating another uglier monster only in a whim of killing the present one.

Being a highly consumptive nation, Total Quality Management, like all other good management concepts, was an alien term for us requiring, like all other foreign concepts, a textual and conceptual localization to match our functional rhyme and reason.

Thanks to Dr Naveed Yousaf, Associate Director of Assessment in the Agha Khan Examination Board who tailored it in a classy manner to synch it with our indigenous framework of comprehension.

He has created an interesting and interactive TQM model based on 6 basic principles of leadership, customers, employees, suppliers, and quality improvement and performance measures.

The assessment of the yield and output of our governance system chiefly crafted and executed by the civil servants through this TQM model renders us with some most horrific findings and conclusions.

As per the model, it is the leadership which must do both the tasks of defining the quality and maintaining the quality within the governance system

Locating Leadership is a tricky thing in our governance system. There is a duality of job one being the functional leadership which falls within the civil service fraternity and other being the oversight leadership acted by the politicians.

Academically, the former must ensure that the quality of public services is maintained while the later provides the public impulse beat as an additive ingredient to make a productive confluence with the public institute work plan. But practically it is the ministerial leadership which engulfs the operative and functional leadership while simultaneously, it is the functional leadership under the civil service which deviates from thinking in the public interest and switches over to becoming a ministerial protectorate.

As per the model, it is the leadership which must do both the tasks of defining the quality and maintaining the quality within the governance system.

This is where our sorry state of civil structure begins where the public institution is turned maid to the elected representative and quality management is compromised to garnering and perpetuating self-interests and hence the vicious circle widens ever so.

This can be safely embraced that our governance system is devoid of any real and meaningful leadership committed to quality supervision and management at the highest strategic level possible.

Role of public in ensuring good governance

The next pair is the one for whom the entire body of the state stands, it is the customers who in this case happens to be the public.

This would not require any lengthy elucidations after observing all our public miseries in terms of poor health, illiteracy, unemployment, crime and felony and

all the ugly transactions of institutional chaos of financial and intellectual corruption.

The public and the government have become poles apart entirely alienated entities. The government-public disconnect has given room to dissipating civic inclusiveness in the realm of public governance system and therefore has erected all the possible barricades towards any material progress and self-realization.

A graduate in political science is made responsible for increasing the agriculture growth and per hectare yield and imagine what would happen?

The governance system has deteriorated to have completely divulged into a one man show where the most important stakeholders of the decision-making process, which is the Public, are prohibited from partaking in this process.

The customer in our case is a silently morbid entity with zero functionality in this model.

The way forward

With the breakdown of these two pivots, the rest of the governance system is rubble good for no reason. The structure has not cracked but has rather fragmented and we are dealing with the debris left over attempting manually to improve its worth and working.

The pillars of employees and the continuous improvement of the quality in the given model when applied to our governance system do not fit in and the conflict resonance becomes so frequent that the equation erupts in some nonsense product.

The over generalized status of the civil service is the same as the one laid down by the British East India Company and therefore it is meant to manage a colony of enslaved hearts and minds and not responsive enough in complementing towards managing a free country posed with the challenges of the 21st century where professional precision and technically scientific knowledge of the fields decide the destiny of any successful sector be it economics, education, industry, aviation, agriculture or any other sector.

A graduate in political science is made responsible for increasing the agriculture growth and per hectare yield and imagine what would happen?

The governance system in Pakistan is not delivering any good while remaining staunchly adherent to its doctrine of existentialism stemming in the colonial times when the then Sovereign had a colony and so he required the masters and the slaves to run the affairs of the colony.

The genetic material of the colonial evolution is still coding the specie of civil service in the paralyzing ranks and files of the master and the slave. The governance system is mercilessly at collusive altar of politicians and civil servants, the twin forces of status quo, and are the only ones getting benefited from the governance system which is meant to benefit the 220 million people of the country.

Source : <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/pakistans-governance-system-needs-major-repairs/>

# **New Dimension in Pak-Saudi Relations |**

## **Editorial**

PAKISTAN and Saudi Arabia have always enjoyed fraternal and special relations but over the last few years, it is really heartening to note that both the sides have started working towards transforming these strong bonds into building a strong partnership in diverse spheres.

And one such field is the promotion of cooperation in the area of arts and culture. Saudi Embassy and Saudi Ministry of Culture in collaboration with Pakistan National Council of the Arts organized an exhibition in Islamabad, depicting the art work of four Saudi women artistes. The people of Pakistan once again proved their true love and affection for the Kingdom by visiting the exhibition in large numbers. The people were highly impressed with the creativity and skills of the Saudi women. The exhibition was first of its kind in Pakistan and we expect that this process will continue in future as well to bring the peoples of two countries further close to each other. Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf Bin Said Al Maliki really deserves appreciation for showing great interest in promoting the culture and art of his country as per the vision of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman. Vision 2030, the brainchild of the Saudi Crown Prince, also envisages the transformation of the Kingdom as a vibrant society with focus on promotion of Saudi culture and the greater role of women in its socio-economic development. This is the reason we are seeing the Kingdom investing heavily on art and culture. Due to common faith, the culture of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia has many affinities. But since every country's culture has its uniqueness and that of the Saudi Arabia has a rich one which is very close to the hearts of Pakistanis, we, therefore, expect that these cultural links, visits, shows and exchanges will be further promoted in the days ahead. In fact there is great potential of cooperation in this field which needs to be exploited in full. Pakistan has started screening its films in Saudi Arabia and both the countries can cooperate further by exchange of films as well as joint production ventures. Our cultural institutions such as the PNCA and performing arts academies could also support Saudi Arabia by training their stage artistes, producers, directors and other related professionals. Enhanced cooperation in this sphere will certainly give a new dimension and horizon to the already strong bonds.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/new-dimension-in-pak-saudi-relations/>

# **Reassessing Pakistan- US Relationship By** **Syed Mohammad Ali**

We live in a world where binary alignments with global or regional hegemonic powers have become less crucial. Less powerful countries still align themselves with more powerful ones (as India does with the United States, or Pakistan with China), these bilateral relationships coexist more readily amidst myriad multilateral engagements.

India tires to engage with China while fashioning itself into a rising Asian power with the wherewithal to offer the US a strategic counterweight to curb Chinese influence in Asia. While the current US administration has been casting Chinese involvement in Pakistan as a zero-sum game, there is growing recognition within the US policymaking community that viewing Pakistan as being under the exclusive sphere of Chinese influence will in fact become a self-fulfilling prophecy, which must be avoided.

Long before 9/11, Pakistan played an important role in the broader network of US alliances that were spread across Europe to the Middle East to Asia. Besides joining the then emerging Cold War alliances in the 1950s, namely the Central Treaty Organization (Ceato) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (Sento), Pakistan also helped facilitate the US rapprochement with China in the 1970s. It also found itself aligning twice with the US in Afghanistan — first against the Soviets, and then in the post-9/11 context.

During these different junctures, Pakistan has benefitted from US largess even if this largess was transactional in nature. Also, the US has played a major role in managing the protracted conflict between Pakistan and India, the significance of which has become more vital after the nuclearisation of the Indian Sub-continent.

The relationship between Pakistan and the US has not been easy. The prospects for cooperation between the two countries have been undermined by a growing divergence in terms of how both countries began to view one another, and their interests vis-à-vis other regional players — especially China, India and Afghanistan.

The US has shown increasing disdain for Pakistan's "ambivalent" role in Afghanistan. American mistrust of Pakistan has been matched by Pakistan's resentment for being arm-twisted into the "fight against terror" in Afghanistan, which soon spilled over the porous border to inflict a heavy price in Pakistan too.

Their mutual co-dependency (Pakistan's dependence on American military and financial aid, and America's dependence on Pakistan to meet its security dominated objectives in the region) has produced recurrent spurts of cooperation and recrimination, rather than a comprehensive and stable framework of bilateral cooperation.

There is an evident need to overcome the apparent turbulence in this bilateral relationship, which remains important for both these countries. While the US is physically withdrawing from Afghanistan, it wants to keep working with Pakistan to prevent Afghanistan's descent into chaos, where groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) become stronger. On the other hand, Pakistan could also do with increased US support to help bolster its image and standing in the international community at large.

Both Pakistan and the US would benefit from a more nuanced approach towards each other due to their own pragmatic reasons. Pakistan and the US need not find themselves on opposing sides of being a junior or the senior partner within a Sino-India strategic rivalry.

The US can keep pursuing its relationship with India, but it must find ways to engage with India in a manner that does not further undermine the Pakistan-US relationship. Pakistan's growing reliance on China could also be better managed if Pakistan can identify means to simultaneously develop a more stable partnership with the US based on mutual national interests.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 13th, 2020.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2174888/6-reassessing-pakistan-us-relationship/>

# **Why Southeast Asia Should Matter to Imran Khan's Pakistan** **By Sidra Tariq Jamil and Mustafa Izzuddin**

On matters of foreign policy, Pakistan has not traditionally been coherent and progressive. Part of the reason is the disruption caused by domestic compulsions, border convulsions, and Pakistan's role in the war on terror, which have collectively hindered the conduct of a robust and effective foreign policy by successive governments in the regional and global arenas.

But in more recent times, there has been a renewed diplomatic appetite to revamp Pakistan's foreign policy after gradual breakthroughs in democratic transitions and attendant domestic political stability, coupled with successes in the war against terrorism. The economic liberalization of Pakistan, despite the recurring domestic roadblocks, has also enabled Islamabad to conduct a foreign policy that is elastic and effective enough to attract investments into the country.

Against this backdrop, the Pakistani government under popular Prime Minister Imran Khan should consider Southeast Asia as a feasible testbed for the conduct of a foreign policy that is synonymous with Khan's idea of Naya (new) Pakistan. Early indications suggest that the Khan government has shown a genuine enthusiasm to advance Pakistan's policy toward Southeast Asia by stepping up both multilateral and bilateral engagements with the region.

The time is therefore opportune and conditions are ripe for Khan to prioritize Southeast Asia in Pakistan's foreign policy and, concomitantly, redress the benign neglect in Pakistan-Southeast Asia relations. Doing so should breathe new life into Pakistan's "Vision East Asia" policy, which was enacted in 2003 to look eastwards for economic engagement. The policy has stagnated because of domestic exigencies and a preoccupation with looking westwards for constructive engagements with regions such as the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia. By looking east, the Khan government could further diversify Pakistan's foreign policy.

An obvious starting point to engage Southeast Asia is through the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Apart from India, which is a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, Pakistan is the only other South Asian country that has a dialogue partnership with ASEAN, albeit a step down at the sectoral level. It has been Pakistan's strategic aspiration to upgrade its sectoral status to a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, as reiterated by the country's current Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in 2019. It is thus not a surprise that Islamabad has been actively lobbying ASEAN countries to support Pakistan's ascent to a full dialogue partner.

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For a start, Pakistan is leveraging the "Muslim brotherliness" of Malaysia and Indonesia to secure the support of the two biggest Muslim countries in Southeast Asia. Pakistan has also been courting Singapore, although thus far, Singapore's support for Pakistan's upgrade to full dialogue partnership appears to be lukewarm. Engaging the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam) countries has brought some joy to Islamabad, as these four states, not least Cambodia, appear to be amenable toward supporting Pakistan's full dialogue partnership with ASEAN. CLMV countries have benefited from the ASEAN-Pakistan Cooperation Fund in aiding their human resources development, including offering scholarships and English language training, which, on the whole, have strengthened the relations between Pakistan and CLMV countries.

Although Pakistan is unlikely to achieve full dialogue partnership anytime soon, the journey toward reaching this goal can rake in benefits for Pakistan that could then endear the Khan government to the domestic population. In the economic field for instance, Pakistan's total bilateral trade with ASEAN of \$6.3 billion suggests that there is scope for Islamabad to scale up its economic engagement with ASEAN through its member-states, especially when compared to India, which has a total bilateral trade with ASEAN of around \$96.8 billion.

It would be in the interest of the Khan government, which is keen on pursuing economic diplomacy in the country's foreign policy, to lend greater urgency and synergy to bring the Pakistan-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) into fruition. Although a joint feasibility study of this FTA was concluded in 2009, there has been little headway made since then and it appears to have faded into oblivion. Pulling the FTA off – as onerous as the task may be – will be a feather in the cap

of Khan's government while also testifying to Pakistan's seriousness to engage ASEAN. Because ASEAN as a collective boasts the fifth largest economy in the world, such an agreement would bring huge economic benefits to Pakistan and thereby helping to improve the lives of Pakistanis.

As a country that has long battled an image problem of being a haven for extremists and terrorists, Pakistan should look to ASEAN as a viable conduit to emphasize to the international community that it is deeply committed to counterterrorism efforts while revamping its image as a country that is moderate, inclusive, and diverse. As such, Khan's government should not only continue to ensure that Pakistan remains an active member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, but also inject more momentum to the Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat Terrorism, which was signed between ASEAN and Pakistan in 2005. Working in partnership with ASEAN on counterterrorism allows Pakistan to boost its chances of becoming a full dialogue partner while also "normalizing" it as a country of repute in the eyes of the international community.

The way ASEAN has been managing its relations with China can hold lessons for Pakistan. As Pakistan draws so much closer to China due to financial inducements under the Belt and Road Initiative, it has to be mindful of not losing its territorial sovereignty and being pressured to do China's bidding. Pakistan should remain neutral on the South China Sea dispute instead of supporting China so as to remain on good terms with claimants from Southeast Asia.

On the bilateral level, Pakistan should also look for ways to strengthen relations with each of the 10 Southeast Asian countries, chiefly in the area of trade and investment. The economic potential in both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia is immense and has not been tapped by Pakistan to the fullest. Another area that is underdeveloped is defense cooperation, as this could aid Pakistan in its defense production and manufacturing. In fact, Pakistani defense planners have identified Southeast Asia as a lucrative market for the export of Pakistan-made arms. Pakistan also has access to training facilities by conducting joint defense and military exercises. The existing maritime exercises Pakistan conducts with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore should continue under Imran Khan as it helps build trust and confidence between Pakistan and Southeast Asia and in so doing contributes to geopolitical tranquility and regional security.

As Southeast Asia is home to a significant Pakistani diaspora, with the largest in Malaysia, the Khan government should step up efforts to court overseas Pakistanis in the hope that they would project a favorable image of Pakistan in the Southeast Asian countries where they reside, and also keep a link to their homeland while contributing to the economy back home. Pakistan has also been keen on exhibiting a people-oriented diplomacy in its foreign policy, which includes encouraging people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and Southeast Asia.

By courting ASEAN, Islamabad hopes that the regional organization and its member-states will be more sympathetic to Pakistan's interests vis-à-vis India, including on the issue of Kashmir. Although ASEAN has taken a neutral position by calling for negotiation to de-escalate tensions between India and Pakistan, a Track II ASEAN advocacy group is set to be created to support Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir. Islamabad also hopes that engaging ASEAN could illustrate that Pakistan under Imran Khan is a stable and normal country that is open for business.

Rather than fixate on India's engagement of Southeast Asia and perceive it as a geopolitical competition, Pakistan under Khan should chart its own path and come up with its own blueprint for engaging Southeast Asia. Pakistan's engagement of Southeast Asia should be a standalone pursuit, rather than engaging Southeast Asia as a countermove to India. Doing so would regretfully take Pakistan down an ill-advised path of frustration and futility.

On the whole, Pakistan should be lauded for its efforts to engage Southeast Asia in the past couple of decades. The litmus test right now is for the Khan government to continue the twin momentum of multilateral and bilateral engagements of Southeast Asia, and in so doing, contribute to bringing the regions of South and Southeast Asia together. Imran Khan should also visit more Southeast Asian countries, as he has thus far only visited Malaysia.

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Staying the course allows Pakistan to enhance bilateral political trust and build up a reservoir of goodwill with countries in Southeast Asia. So, in time, when ASEAN is ready to enlarge its current slate of 10 full dialogue partners, Pakistan

could find itself at the front of the queue. That would be a watershed moment and fitting climax to Pakistan's engagement of Southeast Asia.

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Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/why-southeast-asia-should-matter-to-imran-khans-pakistan/>

# **Pakistan's Evolving Response to COVID-19**

**By Muhammad Faisal**

On February 26, Pakistan reported its first case of COVID-19 in the port-city of Karachi. Since then, the number of cases has risen to nearly 900. On March 13, the federal government announced a nationwide response, including closing borders with Iran and Afghanistan, prohibiting large gatherings, and closing schools across the country. Ten days later, the province of Sindh went into complete lockdown for 15 days while Punjab is expected to do so partially starting March 24. The military has been called in to support provincial governments, if required, in the implementation of stringent measures to deal with the spread of the virus. However, as the situation develops, Pakistan's main concern will be balancing public health needs with the strain COVID-19 places on its already vulnerable economy.

Pakistan's response to the coronavirus has evolved from late January, when it decided against evacuating 500 of its students from Wuhan, the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to concerns about community spread and potentially, the limitations of its public health system to deal with such an emergency. Circumstances changed in mid-February when Pakistan's southwestern neighbor Iran reported a mass COVID-19 outbreak. Every month, thousands of Pakistani citizens visit Iran for business or religious tourism. With Tehran struggling to respond to the spread of the virus, Pakistani pilgrims began returning home via air and overland routes. Thus, Islamabad was pushed into action and swiftly suspended flights from Iran—eventually closing the border—while commencing screening of passengers at airports. At the border town of Taftan, in Balochistan, a temporary isolation center with very basic facilities was set up to house the thousands of returnees from Iran. The inevitable happened on February 26, when the first positive case of COVID-19 was reported in the country.

As the situation develops, Pakistan's main concern will be balancing public health needs with the strain COVID-19 places on its already vulnerable economy.

Besides the initial inertia, some structural challenges have dogged Pakistan's national response to COVID-19. Under the country's decentralized constitutional system, provision of healthcare and health infrastructure are the responsibility of

provincial governments, with the federal government only empowered to regulate the health sector. In the absence of a federally-led nationwide response, provincial governments were left to their own devices. Further, an ongoing economic recession and austerity-driven fiscal policy have complicated the federal government's capacity to respond.

However, as COVID-19 rapidly spread across the country, political pressure continued to build on the federal government to take the lead in response efforts. The first systematic response emerged on March 13, when the government convened an emergency meeting of the National Security Committee, an apex civil-military coordination body, and made the decisions to seal the border with Iran, prohibit large-scale public gatherings such as wedding ceremonies, institute social distancing to limit infections, and close down educational institutions across the country. Provincial governments set up quarantine centers in existing public buildings and evacuated college dorms in key cities. Moreover, Islamabad reached out to Beijing for provision of necessary test kits and other medical supplies to equip healthcare providers and hospitals.

Even as provinces experiment with lockdowns, there is a raging political debate in the country on whether the government should implement a nationwide lockdown of major urban and industrial centers like China and Italy have done and what the implications of such a decision would be. Policymakers face tough choices: can Pakistan afford a de facto shutdown of an economy already in recession? For instance, a shutdown in Sindh will have a direct impact on the country's supply chains since Karachi, the capital of Sindh, is Pakistan's main port for external trade. A nationwide shutdown would harm the most vulnerable in Pakistan – including those working in the country's substantial informal economy, food insecure populations, and those living in slums outside the densely-populated urban centers. Prime Minister Imran Khan has argued against a nationwide lockdown, and thus, Pakistan has seen different strategies for coronavirus containment varying across the country's provinces.

In the coming days, Pakistan's decisions will continue to be guided by the rapidly developing COVID-19 situation at both the domestic and global level. As international financial institutions and multilateral agencies mobilize financial resources to support developing countries, Pakistan is likely to reach out for partial funding to bolster its national efforts to try to mitigate the short- to medium-term impact of COVID-19 on its struggling economy.

Source: <https://www.stimson.org/2020/pakistans-evolving-response-to-covid-19/>

# ECONOMY

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## **Understanding Global Economic Risks By** **Omer Javed**

The World Economic Forum (WEF) recently launched the 15th edition of one of its flagship reports 'The Global Risks Report 2020', which is based on the WEF's annual 'Global Risks Perception Survey'. According to the President of the WEF, Børge Brende, the Report 'comes as long-mounting, interconnected risks are being felt. The global economy is faced with a "synchronized slowdown", the past five years have been the warmest on record, and cyber attacks are expected to increase this year– all while citizens protest the political and economic conditions in their countries and voice concerns about systems that exacerbate inequality... This comes as G20 economies hold record high levels of debt and exhibit relatively low levels of growth. Ammunition to fight a potential recession is lacking, and there is a possibility of an extended low-growth period, akin to the 1970s, if lack of coordinated action continues.'

As per the Report, according to the IMF (International Monetary Fund) expected the global economic growth at 3 percent to be at its lowest level since 2008–2009. Moreover, one of the main policy tools to help boost economic growth, trade, on the other hand has not been able to play much its part at the back of becoming more a source of 'rivalry' than bringing 'global coordination in the form of global trade', whereby 'World Trade Organization (WTO) projected that growth in merchandise trade will slow to 1.2 percent in 2019 from 3.0 percent in 2018.'

To give an example, the US – China trade tensions 'could cost US\$700 billion in lost output in 2020'. This is indeed no small number, since according to the Report this amount of lost output is 'almost the amount of GDP lost by the entire European Union due to the financial crisis (US\$757 billion between 2008 and 2009). With regard to economic risks, the Report highlights 'Low trade barriers, fiscal prudence and strong global investment– once seen as fundamentals for economic growth– are fraying as leaders advance nationalist policies.'

As indicated earlier, there is a need to revisit the traditional macroeconomic policy tools. This is also important for the government and the IMF should look to re-think the policy emphasis of neoliberal economics in the current Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme

An important aspect being highlighted in the Report is about the effectiveness of traditional macroeconomic policy tools, whereby it points out, 'The margins for monetary and fiscal stimuli are also narrower than before the 2008–2009 financial crisis, creating uncertainty about how well countercyclical policies will work. Moreover, there is growing discontent overall with the way governments are attending to economic crises, where it is indicated Disapproval of how governments are addressing profound economic and social issues has sparked protests throughout the world, potentially weakening the ability of governments to take decisive action should a downturn occur. Without economic and social stability, countries could lack the financial resources, fiscal margin, political capital or social support needed to confront key global risks.'

The above is clear indication that national policymakers and global multilateral institutions will have to look beyond the traditional Neo-liberal/ Washington Consensus style of policies, which are entrenched in economic orthodoxy. Rather a heterodox and political economic approach to formulating economic policy will have to be adopted. Already, there is strong debate over increasing the role of government and fiscal policy, and on the other hand diminishing somewhat the role of monetary policy, to better approach macroeconomic and growth targets.

At the same time, 78 percent of the respondents of the Survey on which this Report is based 'expected "economic confrontations" to increase in 2020'. In this regard, the Report pointed out the importance of the USA and China in helping global economic recovery, whereby it indicated, 'Together, these two countries account for over 40 percent of global GDP, and they are the world's leading innovators. They are also the world's top two emitters of greenhouse gases. Expanding the global economy, addressing climate change and realizing the full benefits of technology, therefore, depend on their ability to coordinate as part of a common global system that is capable of including other stakeholders.'

Having said that, as per the Report, rather than coming much together, the signs are on the contrary whereby 'However, the trend today is not one in which these

two countries are just competing across common domains but one in which each is looking to design its own systems— its own supply chains, 5G networks and global investment institutions. Already investment flows between the two have dropped, each has moved to restrict technology from the other, and some analysts predict China will look to reduce its dependence on the US dollar by holding more foreign currencies. Even if the current trade tensions cool, we risk heading towards an era in which the two countries disentangle their economies and create barriers between one another.’ This trend needs to change, and should give way to more collaboration, so that global economic issues could be dealt with more effectively through a unified effort.

The outlook for investment as per the Report is also not bright, primarily because ‘Globally, investment has been affected by low expected returns, uncertainty about economic policy in major economies, and ongoing and emerging geopolitical tensions. In our survey, “protectionism regarding trade and investment” and “populist and nativist agendas”— two major obstacles to the free flow of foreign direct investment (FDI)— were rated as the fifth and sixth risks most likely to increase through 2020.

The Report highlighted that according to the IMF, globally private and public debt has been accumulating since the crisis... the global ratio of debt-to-GDP increased by 11 percentage points between 2009 and 2017. Across G20 economies, public debt is expected to reach 90 percent of GDP in 2019— the highest level on record— and to grow even more, to 95 percent in 2024.’ Moreover, as per the Report ‘The IMF has listed “rising corporate debt burdens” as a key vulnerability in the global financial system.’

As indicated earlier, there is a need to revisit the traditional macroeconomic policy tools. This is also important for the government and the IMF should look to re-think the policy emphasis of neoliberal economics in the current Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme. In fact, the Report emphasizes revisiting in particular the new challenges facing monetary policy in particular, whereby with regard to this and to the overall needed re-think, it highlights ‘Financial market stress and strained public finances are creating uncertainty as to whether conventional monetary and fiscal policy instruments, which have worked to boost growth in the past, could be as effective in the future. As the IMF has signalled, interest rate cuts have helped boost growth, but they have also fostered higher debt and riskier rent-seeking, which affect financial market stability. In 2019,

monetary policies worldwide saw profound reversals, with most central banks persistently cutting interest rates to very– sometimes historically– low levels... The role and reach of monetary policies are also challenged by wider factors such as technological change, climate change and rising inequality.'

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/03/01/understanding-global-economic-risks/>

# **COVID-19: Economic Development**

## **Implications – Analysis By Michael H. Cecire**

The current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has led to tens of thousands of cases and thousands of deaths worldwide. In addition to the disease's mortality and public health effects, it may have potentially significant economic implications, including productivity losses, supply chain disruptions, labor dislocation, and potential financial pressure on businesses and households.

Relatively few federal programs are available to provide timely economic relief to affected businesses. This Insight considers the outbreak's economic development implications and policy considerations for Members of Congress who have shown interest in addressing the economic dimensions of this public health issue.

### COVID-19 Economic Development Implications

COVID-19 is a newly designated disease caused by a previously undetected coronavirus. Most cases have been reported in China, with additional cases on every inhabited continent. Clusters of illness have occurred in South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Italy, and Iran.

The COVID-19 outbreak is foremost a public health issue. However, the epidemic itself and containment measures in China and elsewhere could have significant economic implications for the United States and globally. In the short-term, the COVID-19 outbreak is primarily a threat to businesses dependent on supply chains in China, or for exports there. However, many economists have warned that a more prolonged crisis may see broader economic disruptions if workplaces and schools are closed to contain the outbreak, and medical and food supplies dwindle due to disrupted supply and increased demand.

In China, mass containment measures have disrupted global supply chains and capital markets. In the near term, the outbreak's effects on the U.S. economy could be limited to localized disruptions for businesses and workers—particularly in communities dependent on technology manufacturing and tourism. In certain

cases, supply chain issues may stall production, prevent companies from fulfilling orders, and potentially impact firm revenues.

In a prolonged or wider epidemic, supply chain issues may further compound. Growth could slow further, and affected companies may be forced to furlough or lay off workers, and others may slow hiring. As demonstrated in China and elsewhere, social distancing measures can effectively stop local economic activity, which may impact localized labor markets, household finances, and governmental tax revenues and service delivery.

Additional considerations include potential shortages of medical supplies and foodstuffs, other ancillary health effects, and the U.S. medical and public health system's ability to cope with a significant outbreak.

### Considerations for Congress

Many Members of Congress have heard concerns from constituents affected by supply chain-, exports-, and tourism-related disruptions from the outbreak. Relatively few federal programs exist to provide timely relief to businesses for outbreak-related disruptions. Some programs include:

The Small Business Administration (SBA) administers disaster and non-disaster loans for small businesses and organizations, and supports an extensive network of SBA-affiliated resource partners who provide management and technical assistance to small businesses;

The Department of the Treasury's Community Development Financial Institution Fund supports organizations that provide loans to businesses, homebuyers, community developers, and investors in distressed areas; and

The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development program offers limited services to support rural businesses to create or retain jobs.

In the event that disruptions continue and grow, public and non-profit organizations may consider tapping various federal economic development resources, including:

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program may be used for technical assistance, community assets, and workforce development;

The Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration programs may be used to diversify local economic bases;

USDA programs can provide technical assistance and infrastructure support; and Federal regional commissions and authorities support economic diversification, workforce development, and technical assistance in their service areas.

Federal economic development programs are generally not equipped to provide rapid support to firms or communities affected by public health emergencies, though unemployment compensation programs have the ability to rapidly respond and provide immediate income support. In response to a COVID-19 outbreak, Congress may consider measures used in past disasters or economic crises:

CDBG authorities for disaster recovery (CDBG-DR) could be utilized to address the outbreak's economic impact. Previous CDBG-DR uses included loans and grants to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), workforce development, and community stabilization.

Public health-related disruption eligibility for SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs) could be made explicit. EIDLs provide up to \$2 million to small businesses that suffer economic injury following disasters such as hurricanes. EIDLs may be awarded if the President issues a disaster or emergency declaration, or a disaster declaration by the SBA administrator upon request from a state governor.

In response to the 2007-2009 recession, federal measures included direct interventions to stabilize industries and markets. A similar effort could support affected industries or supply chains, and/or federal loan guarantees to assist affected SMEs.

In the recession, Unemployment Compensation benefits were temporarily augmented and extended, with some costs temporarily assumed by the federal government. Disaster Unemployment Assistance, which provides federally funded unemployment benefits to those unable to work as a result of a federally

declared disaster and otherwise ineligible for regular benefits, could be a model for responding to public health emergencies.

Following a federally declared disaster, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) can provide tax relief to affected individuals. The IRS could provide such allowances to affected individuals and SMEs affected by a public health emergency.

Other federal emergency authorities could be utilized in more severe scenarios for individual and public assistance. In such cases, localities with major revenue shortfalls from federally declared disasters—such as those highly dependent on a dislocated industry, such as tourism—could utilize Community Disaster Loans, which provide up to \$5 million in liquidity and are potentially forgivable.

The President may also call upon the Defense Production Act (DPA) to mobilize key segments of the economy in response to the outbreak. In major national emergencies, DPA authorities may be used to rebalance disrupted critical supply chains, and to allocate and procure emergency supplies.

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Source: This article was published by Congressional Research Service (PDF)

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/02032020-covid-19-economic-development-implications-analysis/>

## **Historic Fall in Inflation By Dr Pervez Tahir**

The rate of inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) year on year, rose sharply by 14.6% in January 2020. In February, the rate of increase was lower at 12.4%. This is a fall of 2.2 percentage points. On February 21, this column had also predicted that the supply side actions taken by the government would lead to a decline in the rate of inflation. But a fall as big as this has come as a surprise. Such magnitudes of change characterised only the uptrends of inflation. With the base of 2015-16, there was an increase of 1.8 percentage points in March 2019. In August 2019, there was an even higher rise of 2.1%. Again in January, the inflation rate shot up by two percentage points. In contrast, the decline in the rate of inflation has generally been less than one percentage point. The latest come down of inflation, i.e., the CPI in February 2020, is historic in the sense that percentage decline is the highest in the past 32 months. Not only that, the magnitude of the decline is larger than the magnitude of rises in this entire period.

Food prices, atta (flour) and sugar in particular, led the big push in the CPI for January. The New Year hopes were dashed by the ineptitude of the New Pakistan band. Come February and food inflation, on the whole, fell faster than it rose. In urban areas, food inflation in January was higher by 2.8 percentage points, but in February it fell by as much as 4.3 percentage points. In rural areas, food inflation rose by 4.1 percentage points in January; and fell in February by the same extent. What was behind this historic fall? One thing is obvious. If the leadership has the good of the ordinary folks closest to its heart, it can always find ways to provide succour. For decades, the country has had in place a fairly workable system to ensure a steady supply of staples and, in the event of a disaster beyond control, provide relief through subsidised sales from official outlets. The federal as well provincial governments failed to plan the supply before December, making inflation in January the likely peak of the current fiscal year. For the relief, the Prime Minister had to take charge himself to revive the Utility Stores Corporation (USC) against the wishes of his Advisor on Commerce and Industry, order action against hoarding and profiteering to the dismay of some federal and provincial ministers and approve subsidies and hold utility price rise to the surprise of his economic team. This is what has caused the historic fall of the CPI in February. With the petroleum prices cut down significantly, though wisely not to the full extent of the fall in world prices against the PM's own

protestations in the past, inflation is now likely to be on the downhill for the rest of the fiscal years.

The average inflation rate in the first eight months of the fiscal year is 11.7%. In the last two monetary policy statements, the State Bank forecast for the year as a whole was in the range of 11-12%. At a recent appearance before the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly, the State Bank Governor extended the upper limit of the range to 12.5%. The last Monetary Policy Committee had met before the January number was available. If the next meeting is held after the CPI for March is known, maintaining the present policy rate will be a hard sell.

Published in The Express Tribune, March 6th, 2020.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2170191/6-historic-fall-inflation/>

# **Impact Of locusts Attack on Pak Economy By Hafsa Qazi**

LOCUSTS are posing a serious threat to the farmers in Punjab during these days while they have already ravaged the farms in Sindh. The menace they are causing is alarming and they initially originated from the Arabian Peninsula but then moved towards the South Asian region due to favourable weather conditions. Now as we all know that Sindh is the second largest cotton producer in Pakistan and the damage done there by miniature insects capable of a large scale destruction i.e. Locusts, has destroyed Pakistan economically and stability wise.

The cotton and textile industries play a dominant role in exports; cotton accounts for 55 per cent of country's export earnings and Pakistan has a 14% share of world's cloth exports. Considering Pakistan's Annual GDP growth rate of 2019, agriculture, forestry and fishing contributes to 11% of 53% of total GDP. Cotton is Pakistan's prize crop and since the invasion of locusts in June 2019, about 40% of crops have been destroyed by the incursion which mainly included cotton of course. Pakistan's economy mainly consists of cotton and textile as Pakistan has an agro-based industry and the destruction of crops in 2019, and now 2020, the cotton production has decreased by 19%. According to the US Department of Agriculture, the growth rate of cotton exports was 66.67% in the year 2019 and this is not so bad if the percentage is considered but if we look back to the growth rate in 1993, the percentage was 72.94% and in the same year Pakistan was plagued by the same attack. And right now, due to lower temperature in Punjab, locusts are making their way to the farms over there and this time the situation is worse and the reason is that the locusts' type is the most notorious one i.e. Desert Locusts (*Schistocerca gregaria*) and these locusts are the ones which caused significant losses to crops in West Africa in the years 2004-5 and had an adverse effect on the food and land security in the affected region. Pakistan can lose hundreds of acres of land, if the problem is not tackled the right way. Pakistan's Information Minister Firdous Ashiq Awan said: "We are facing the worst locust infestation in more than two decades and have decided to declare a national emergency to deal with the threat." Even though the precautionary measures are being taken and a specific kind of pesticide is being sprayed on crops i.e. fipronil, this pesticide itself is very harmful for human health so even if the crops are saved, they are of no use (only taking into account the food crops this

time). The economy of Pakistan, God forbid, can be in a shambles, considering the fact that the stock market and businesses are already facing numerous issues. So there's a really high chance that the growth rate of Pakistan is going to be really low this year. According to the report of Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association (PCGA), there was a 21.09pc decline in the cotton production in the year 2019. Punjab, being the only province with lion production of cotton, failed to meet the cotton production target in 2019. The statistics indicate that a total of 4.44 million bales had arrived at the cotton market till October 15, which are 1.6 million bales or 26.54 percent less than 5.044 million bales over the corresponding period last year. Unlike the surplus cotton production in the year 2011-12, due to infortunes like the one discussed in this article, there is an approximate gap of 5 million bales in the years 2019- 20. And in order to keep the textile industry running, there is a dire need of cotton imports from the US and Brazil which would be of high costs i.e. about 6 million bales, according to the President of KCCI. This would, resultantly, put a burden of \$1.5 billion on the foreign exchange reserves. Hence, there should be quick and early solution derived for this matter by the government as the textile industries are crucial for the economic stability in Pakistan and the cotton shortage would terribly affect the performance of the textile sector.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/impact-oflocusts-attack-on-pak-economy/>

# War of Economies By Anam Khan

The supreme Union of Soviet Socialist Republic disintegrated into fifteen independent countries. The world-acclaimed it as a victory of freedom and supremacy of democracy. The USSR was an epitome of a socialist economy that was centrally planned and commanded. December 1991, the declaration of Supreme Soviet-led to lowering down Soviet flag last time.

The radical reforms wreaked havoc on the already stagnant economy. A declined growth and lower productivity of the Soviet economy were indicating the sluggish behaviour of their leadership. The political and economic propagandas to gradually attrite the superpower was led by none other than the emerging United States. The country avoided direct military confrontation but fueled speculation of an imminent Afghan war creating a mess of uncertainty thus giving birth to Russia. The war ended but the Afghan Taliban existed and later dubbed as the masterminds behind 9/11 terrorist attacks.

China and the US are the two largest economies in the world. They are large not only in GDP but also among the largest in international trade, production and manufacturing. Undisputedly, the relationship between the two countries will have huge good or bad impacts on not only their economies but also globally on the small economies.

Over the years, the United States-China relationship has been through a bumpy road. The countries never supported each other as the diplomatic institutions were constantly emitting signals of rivalry and conflict. China gradually rose to prominence as one of the growing economies with a good reach in the global technology market. Around the globe, countries are investing a massive amount of funds into the development of technology hence acquiring the digital market space.

One of the crucial issues in today's international trade is contention in free trade between the United States-China. In fact, this is a trade war where top-two largest world economies participate in pitching their economic potential as swords drawn to protect their interests. It is an economic conflict when one country attacks another by raising tariffs or considering trade barriers on imports. It was launched first by the US imposing an additional 25% of tariffs on many

goods imported from China, and then China retaliated by imposing additional tariffs on several imports of the US. The feud did not stop here, and the two countries went to another round of tariff escalations.

The allies of the United States also have displayed a non-friendly attitude in driving policies and investments towards the Chinese economy. Clearly the political scenario signals risk to partners in trade with the United States if they enter into trade agreements with China. China has a global influence in exercising soft power that is the ability to shape the regional and global environment without overt military involvement, thus It does not seek to conquer lands so far.

The most comparable event from this perspective is the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. This term has already crept in use for the US-China Economic and political rivalry. The United States and the Soviet Union conflict was played through intentional strategies related to shutdowns of technology and markets for one another, rivalry to expand the circle of influence having diplomatic and bilateral relations with other developed nations, tossing over unfriendly governments and sponsoring proxy wars.

US-China rivalry is following the same trajectory. The rapidly increasing denials of US technology to Chinese firms, notably the expanded assessments of Chinese investments in the technology sectors of United States denotes the friction between the two. Laying an embargo on Huawei US exports of technology to China that was developed in the United States is the recent case to cite.

One may ponder that probably the US is fielding its new strategy to counter China's Belt and Road initiative and the China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Imran Khan's visit to Donald Trump was an attempt to revitalize their diplomatic relationships. Either on exit or extending its presence in Afghanistan, the United States require the cooperation of Pakistan. If in case Pakistan delivers an honourable exit from Afghanistan, United states might give a nod to revive the military aid and grants to Pakistan. China has waited for the United States to make a move and the Geostrategic position of Pakistan has raised its credulity for the United States.

Chinese interest is mostly around about improving communications for which Gwadar Port attains utmost importance hence the security, reputation and stability of Pakistan are essential to Chinese investment. US took the lead in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to put Pakistan on the grey list while it had further strained bilateral ties.

China is Pakistan's largest creditor; the Chinese developmental projects and efforts have proven more beneficial and fruitful. It is since the Pak-China partnership is based on development and cooperation while the US-Pakistan partnership is security-driven.

China has always built a peaceful environment and has been opened to the world including the United States, rather than having an inconclusive militaristic and belligerent indulgence in competition for a superpower. This is apparently one of the major lessons the Chinese learned from the fall of the Soviet Union. China suggested to the United States that "seeking common ground while reserving differences" is possible. In long-run it might be a win-win for Pakistan as it would benefit being a bridge between both US and China, hence we are expecting a Chinese delegation, or another high profile visit to Pakistan soon.

Source : <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/10-Sep-2019/war-of-economies?>

# **Oil, The Pandemic And The Global Economy**

## **By Shahid Javed Burki**

Is the sudden drop in the price of oil in world markets as big a crisis as its sudden rise in the mid-1970s? The one almost half a century ago badly hurt oil-importing countries, in particular those in the developing part of the world. For them oil was an important component of their import bill. Not being able to finance the sharp increase in the price of oil, these countries borrowed heavily, thus creating a serious international debt crisis. The debt crisis of the 1970s stretched into the 1980s and affected large regions such as Latin America and East Asia. Washington took the lead in bringing changes in the structure of the international system. A new facility was created within the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to quickly provide relatively cheap money to the affected nations. No such leadership can be expected from Donald Trump's America.

Global markets can handle one crisis at a time but when two arrive simultaneously, they swoon. This is what is happening at this time. To begin with, there is the coronavirus pandemic. On March 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) gave the spread of the virus the name of pandemic. That means it spreads easily and widely. It asked its member governments to take steps to reduce the spread. The disease has already caused disruptions across the globe. China locked down Wuhan, a major industrial city on the Yangtze River with a population of 11 million people. The authorities restricted the movement of people living in the city both leaving it or within it. Italy has done the same but not in one city but for the entire country. Stopping travel to and from the country would seriously hurt the tourist trade in Italy. Tourism accounts for 13% of Italy's gross domestic product (GDP). Even if that is cut by one-half, it would have a devastating impact on Europe's fourth largest economy and its still fragile banking system. Italy is not the only country to be affected by the likely decline in international tourism. On March 11, New Delhi decided to suspend all tourist visas until at least the middle of April.

But when all this was going on, two of the world's three largest producers of oil couldn't agree on the quantities they should bring out of the ground and put them on the world markets. A significant share of the global supply comes from three countries — the United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia. The fact that the US

has moved from being a large importer to one that now exports significant quantities is one reason for the uncertainty that is affecting the world oil market. But the current turmoil is the result of a major disagreement between the other two large producers — the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Russia.

What had once been called a “union until death do us part” suddenly collapsed as nationalist forces in Russia won the domestic debate over the price of oil. Moscow and Riyadh had determined that keeping the price of traded oil low was in their interest. That policy had been opposed by Igor I Sechin, the head of Rosneft, and a close associate of President Vladimir Putin. Both had known each other since they were junior officials in the 1990s in St Petersburg. Sechin and others in the nationalist camp believed that keeping oil prices high only helped the US where natural gas and oil extracted from shale had turned the country into the world’s largest producer of hydrocarbons. That policy hurt Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned energy giant, and also Rosneft. These two state enterprises are the two pillars of the Russian state sector.

The agreement between Russia and Saudi Arabia was aimed at putting a floor under the price of oil but Sechin and his nationalist associates maintained that that approach only helped companies in the US. These had developed and used technologies that allowed them to reach deep down into the earth, crack rocks that held oil and bring it to the surface. These technologies were economically not viable if the price of oil dropped below \$40 a barrel. Also worrying was the loss of important markets in Europe and East Asia to the Americans. In January 2020, the US announced plans to export crude to China. The Chinese market was being eyed by the Russian enterprises that were planning to exploit the vast but costly-to-reach deposits in Siberia. However, the cost of extracting oil from the Siberian underground was more than \$60 a barrel. The Saudi cost was only \$10.

The Saudis and the Russians met in Moscow but couldn’t agree on production quotas. Alexander Novak, the Russian oil minister, returned to Moscow for consultations. According to one assessment, “the standoff was ominous for the industry. Not had OPEC and a wider group of producers — known as OPEC plus — failed to agree on new cuts, but they had also failed to sign off on an extension of 2.1 million barrels a day in previous trims that would expire at the end of March. That created a danger of tremendous flow of oil coming onto a market that was already hugely oversupplied and experiencing a steep slump in demand.”

The Russians and the Saudis have had difficult relations ever since Moscow joined the OPEC discussions without formally becoming a member of the organisation. These discussions are recounted in *Out of the Desert*, a book by Ali Naimi, the longtime Saudi oil minister who went into retirement a few years ago. According to him, the price large producers settle upon reflects the imperatives of domestic policy. Naimi has been succeeded by Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, the half brother of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The Crown Prince is keeping a close watch on matters relating to oil. The Saudis absorbed most of the cuts, a situation that caused tension in Riyadh.

The uncertainty brought about by the accelerating pace of the twin crises has caused a great deal of worry in financial and economic circles. As recently as January 2020, United States Federal Reserve officials expressed the worry that “financial imbalances — including overvaluation and excessive indebtedness — could amplify an adverse shock to the economy.” That shock came from an unexpected source — a virus. The two shocks together have unsettled the financial markets. In early March, various indices reflecting the thinking of investors in the US have gone through wide fluctuations. The risk is that a wave of defaults and bankruptcies in the oil sector may start a chain reaction and impact on the parts of the economy that were already weakened by the coronavirus crisis. The two crises are acting and reacting on one another.

Published in *The Express Tribune*, March 16th, 2020.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2176789/6-oil-pandemic-global-economy/>

# EDUCATION

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## **Education: Looking Forward By Faisal Bari**

ALL educational institutions, across the country, are currently closed. This is as it should be. The same is true of most schools in most countries across the world. The government has, for now, said that schools will remain closed till April 5. This date is likely to be extended. We cannot open schools as long as we do not have control over the spread of the coronavirus. We cannot take the risk of infecting a large number of people. Even if children do not get very sick if they get the virus, they become carriers. This is a risk we should not take.

If schools remain closed till end May or June and then we enter the summer vacation and cannot have schools opening till mid-July or somewhere around that time, what will this mean for education? Clearly, it is a major disruption that will create some ripples. But if the delay is only of a few months, the ripples can easily be contained and dealt with by the end of the current calendar year.

We were almost at the end of the last academic year when schools were closed. So, from the point of view of curriculum coverage, most schools were probably in revision mode by now. Examinations were to be held in March. These had to be postponed. But this should not be a major issue. For grades 1-8, we only have school-based and/or internal examinations. We will not lose a whole lot if we moved all children to the next grade without examinations in these grades this year.

When the children come back, they should start in the next grade. For grades 1-8, having a pass on your transcript, for one year, is not going to impact the educational trajectories of these children in any way. This was done in Pakistan in 1976-77 as well. To the best of my knowledge, there were no adverse effects on educational standards that were recorded.

The HEC and most universities are already looking at online teaching as an alternative.

Where external and/or board examinations are concerned, we cannot do without these examinations. These are usually school-leaving exams and next stage admissions depend on performance on these examinations. These will need to be held, even if they get delayed a lot. If the examinations are held in July/August, instead of March/April, there will be a four-month delay. If we can rush results a little, we could probably start the new academic session for school-finishing students by December/January. So, we lose one semester. But, most universities could cover that semester quite easily in the next summer.

Most universities were in the middle of their spring semester. But here too, even if we cannot come back by May or June, the disruption can be reasonably contained without major changes in learning outcomes. The Higher Education Commission and most universities are already looking at online teaching as an alternative. These systems will probably be put in place in the next couple of weeks. Even if they are not and the spring semester has to be extended to the summer, it is not a huge cost. This and the next summer can be used to absorb some of the disruption cost.

If the educational disruption, and it should be clear that I am only talking about the delivery of education here, is only for a few months hopefully; students, parents, teachers and administrators need not panic. A lot of work will need to be done, but the cost of the disruption can be managed relatively well and reasonably.

However, we should be prepared for another scenario as well. The coronavirus might not go away in a few months. Even after the first wave has been lived through, and we are currently at the beginning of the first wave, the virus will be around and will possibly continue to impact people till the latter develop immunity, the virus fades away, or a vaccine is found. This might mean that issues of distancing, minimal contact and other precautions might have to be in place for a year or so. If this is the case, and we pray it is not, the adjustment in education will have to be much larger and much more permanent.

If students cannot return to schools and universities till the end of the year, or can only come back with restrictions about numbers of people in a room and/or dormitory, we will be in uncharted territory. Pakistan has 200,000-plus schools, we have a very large five-to-16-year-old population; it will not be easy to figure out online solutions for such large numbers. Elite private-sector institutions might

be able to shift to online services or hybrid models, but for most Pakistanis, who do not have internet access or will not have the resources to have internet access, the shift is not possible, even if we designed an effective education delivery system. A solution here would require much deeper thinking.

Solutions developed in higher-income countries might not be of immense help for us here. Our school system is much larger, with a lot more students, our resources are more restricted, household poverty levels much higher, parental education lower and internet availability far more sketchy. So, we might have to find our own solutions in this case.

Though the university sector is much smaller in Pakistan, with only 200-odd universities, it will not be easy for them either to create new systems that have to either fully deliver education through online systems, or create a hybrid model for education delivery that limits in-class interactions significantly. But if coronavirus-related restrictions persist across the world, we might be able to benefit from solutions that might get created in other parts of the globe.

If virus-related issues last only a few months, education-sector disruptions will not be too damaging and can be reasonably managed. This should not worry policymakers, parents or students too much. We have bigger issues related to the virus to worry about. If issues persist even after the first wave, till the end of the year or beyond, we will be in uncharted territory and will require much deeper thinking for schools as well as universities to be able to manage education delivery issues.

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and an associate professor of economics at Lums.

Published in Dawn, March 20th, 2020

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1542331/education-looking-forward>

# **Coronavirus stunts learning as Pakistan's education system is thrown into disarray** **By Sijal**

Coronavirus has forced Pakistan into a difficult situation and while all of the state institutions are struggling to deal with the pandemic, the education sector is no exception, online teaching has put teachers and students in the country to test.

Following the Higher Education Commission's (HEC) directives, educational institutes across the country are trying to deal with the crisis at hand; however, many students seem unsatisfied with the way they are being provided with education online by their institutes.

Last week, '#WeRejectOnlineEducation' popped up as one of the top trends in Pakistan on Twitter, according to a report published by The News on March 27.

The News spoke with students and educators to get both sides of the story.

'We are overburdened'

A Karachi University student told The News, their online class was suspended after many students — majority hailing from the middle and lower-middle classes — were not able to attend the classes as they faced connectivity issues or did not have smartphones.

Another student at a private university in Karachi said his teachers “were not able to reach out to the students as they do, physically, in the classroom.”

"Students were accustomed to the classroom environment and it is not easy for them to shift to online classes all of a sudden," he added.

“We are being overburdened with assignments and are unable to take practical classes due to the pandemic. The teachers are giving us tons of assignments which are practically impossible to do at the given deadlines — as they [teachers] are trying to fill in the gaps, caused by the coronavirus,” a student at another private university in Karachi said.

“I cannot understand what my teacher teaches me online, they cannot explain themselves clearly,” an O-level student at a private school said.

'Quick transition not easy'

In a country like Pakistan shifting to online education is not that easy.

“Pakistan is not a tech-savvy country which is one of the major reasons we are having problems in the education sector after the pandemic caused a countrywide shutdown,” Noman Ansari, a senior lecturer at Riphah International University, Islamabad said.

“Sooner or later, despite all the adversities, we will have to move some segments of our education towards virtual learning and coronavirus has given us that opportunity,” he noted.

“The biggest problem at hand is that teachers have no idea of how to deliver and students are not capable of comprehending it, as we had to shift our mode of teaching hurriedly,” he said, adding, “Quick transition is not easy, especially in Pakistan as the country is not technologically advanced.”

“Students are not used to of using their cognitive abilities to cope with the problems,” he said. “They are also trying to deviate from these classes and making excuses to halt them as for those who pay a semester fee of 90k-to 60k, buying average equipment or at least a smartphone is not much of a hassle.”

Director of Center for Excellence in Journalism, Institute of Business Administration, Kamal Siddiqi said: “Since we are heading towards a new direction, students and teachers alike are beginning to adjust to this new way. It is my humble opinion that recorded lectures are better than those that are synchronous.”

“There are a few challenges [in online education], one is technology and knowing how to use it, then there is acknowledging which platform to use,” he said, adding: “ One should be keen on using the already available platforms — especially the ones that students already know to how to use. “

“In terms of technical aspect, everyone has a laptop that has a camera, it is not much of a challenge to record lectures. Those who don't know can learn now. However, there are some who are unwilling to conduct lectures despite the available technology, upon personal insecurities,” he noted.

Responding to a question on how the students would be motivated to engage in online lectures, Siddiqi said: “The situation these days is not exactly ideal. Students have nowhere to go and nothing better to do.”

“I believe online classes will provide them with something beneficial. The youngsters are online all the time, whether it be Netflix or Facebook that is keeping them busy. Academia is a better investment of time. Since online classes are here to stay. This is not only just because of the lockdown. I believe we will move towards blended learning,” Siddiqi added.

Muneeb-ul-Hasan a lecturer at a private institute — teaching undergraduate students — said, “I provide students with recordings, PDF books, and give them assignments. So far, the response has been good because the students can hear my lectures just like songs on their playlist.”

Yaseen Alam an O-level's teacher at a private school in Karachi tells us that he has received positive feedback from the students and that these classes were helping him in keeping the topic short, precise, and to the point, which is beneficial for both parties.

Meanwhile, Shahida, a government school teacher said they had finished the school year and were preparing to conduct examinations but were unable to do so due to the school closure orders.

The federal government, in late March, had announced that education institutions across Pakistan would remain closed till May 31 after cases of the coronavirus started surging in the country.

'Introduce schemes for students'

Alishbah Sijal, a student at Karachi University, told The News that online classes should take place as we need to shift towards virtual learning sooner or later. “The better way for teachers and educational institutions is to record lectures rather than giving them in real-time. This way we can cope with the hindrances

and the students can easily access lectures even on a slow internet connection,” she said.

She added, “Laptop schemes at university and college levels should be reintroduced so that in future, such a gap does not come in between classes and every pupil would have the required equipment to access the class.”

“A subsidised internet package should be introduced for students so that they can easily get high-speed internet to help them in their online study,”

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/640402-coronavirus-stunts-learning-as-pakistans-education-system-is-thrown-into-disarray>

### Quality Of Education In Pakistan May Further Deteriorate Through Online Learning By Tania Saeed

The response of higher educational institutions in their urgency to transition into the virtual world of teaching during the coronavirus pandemic on the basis of ensuring that ‘learning’ is not disrupted with the closure of colleges and universities till May 31 exposes the irrelevance of student and teacher experiences in the learning process. The emphasis is essentially on delivery – we need to deliver education to our students, fulfil the requirements of the academic year or semester so that the student does not lose out, thereby fulfilling our duties as providers of education.

What is completely lost in this scenario is the reality of a pandemic and its impact on the student and the teacher– not just the physical, emotional, or psychological trauma that comes from members of a family, or neighbours falling sick, but of livelihoods being disrupted as businesses close down, and workers across the country lose their jobs, theirs and their families only means of survival.

Students may be taking care of family members, living in precarious conditions, suffering from hunger or living in abusive homes, or even worried about loved ones working in hospitals and clinics. It is in this context that we want to ensure that ‘learning’ as delivered through our educational institutions is not disrupted, where students learn online, and teachers (who may be surviving in similar circumstances) transition into the virtual world for which they have limited training – all the while living through this pandemic.

In the past two weeks a lot has been written on both the need and the limitation of online/virtual/remote teaching in Pakistan. The uncertainty of this pandemic with no end in sight has resulted in educational institutions exploring alternative methods of education, where online teaching seems to be the most viable option. Universities, mostly private that are well resourced are already exploring innovative ways of delivering education during this pandemic.

Public sector universities are equally encouraging online classes to ensure the semester continues despite this disruption. The limitation that has rightly been highlighted is one of infrastructure: this ranges from internet access, as evident in the recent protests by students in Wana, to basic issue of electricity and power cuts; lack of trained teachers who themselves may struggle with access to the internet, and the danger of quality (already a problem in the education sector in Pakistan) further deteriorating through online education.

#### READ No, Online Education Is Not A Workable Solution In Pakistan

The examples shared under the campaign #BoycottOnlineClasses on social media by students and teachers shows the extent of the problem, where the rush in ensuring education is not disrupted seems to be at the expense of students and teachers, rather than for them. The fact that the government has given the option of closing universities till May 31 should be seen as an opportunity to develop a Plan B through collaboration with students and teachers, rather than forcing online education that further compromises quality.

The uncertainty of the pandemic has necessitated the need to consider alternative ways of education delivery, but these cannot be decided through a top-down bureaucratic mechanism when the most integral players in this system are the students and the teachers. Delivery of education is irrelevant if it does not ensure quality learning. In such a context, student unions, and teacher unions could have been a useful source of collaboration. However, organisations such as the Progressive Students Collective, and the Professors and Lecturers Association for different provinces can provide important points of correspondence.

The closure of educational institutions can be an opportunity for universities to evaluate the needs of their students, using empirical data from admission records, and consulting student and teacher organisations to explore the kind of

obstacles that exist on the ground amongst their diverse student body and teachers, and the ways in which these obstacles can be overcome. All of this requires communication and collaboration with teachers and students.

Furthermore, examples of students mobilising and driving relief efforts in their communities have been widespread; this could provide an important point of introspection for educational institutions, where such acts of solidarity can become an important part of the learning curriculum that goes beyond a textbook and a classroom. Innovation during times of crisis in education is not just about technology in the way it is being approached right now, but also introspection related to knowledge, the relevance of the learning experience for the everyday realities of students and teachers. As we think of alternatives, we need to re-evaluate what we consider learning, especially during a pandemic where that textbook knowledge seems to be increasingly irrelevant.

There is the added importance of recognising gendered educational inequalities that exist within the household. The triple burden on women will be exacerbated for female teachers and students, where their access to teaching and learning will further be compromised as they take on the added responsibility of household and care work, while expecting to teach and attend classes at home.

Further problematic is the assumption that home life will be conducive to learning, overlooking the kind of physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse that may exist inside homes, where for many students and teachers campuses were safer options than their homes.

Rushing into an online mode of teaching will most certainly exacerbate educational inequalities as they exist in Pakistan today. While it is important to recognise the uncertainty related to COVID-19 and the need for a Plan B in education if educational institutions remain closed, that Plan B can only be successful if the existing reality of students and teachers is taken into account. There is a need to recognise the physical, emotional and psychological toll of the existing pandemic on teachers and students. Disruption to 'learning' during a pandemic is only natural, but to force some form of artificial continuity in the name of 'learning' is nothing more than a façade if it does not take into account the students and teachers that are central to the education process.

If the rush towards online teaching is causing more stress and frustration for teachers and students during a pandemic, educational institutions, both public and private, must take the time given to them by the government that closed down universities till May 31 to better plan in collaboration with their teachers and students, instead of becoming a source of undue stress in the midst of a pandemic.

Source: <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/04/quality-of-education-in-pakistan-may-further-deteriorate-through-online-learning/>

# WORLD

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## **Historic Peace Deal | Editorial**

SOMETHING impossible appears to be becoming possible. Peace finally appears to be in sight in the conflict-ridden Afghanistan with the signing of peace deal between Afghan Taliban and the United States on Saturday after months of negotiations in Qatar's capital Doha. Indeed both the sides deserve appreciation for showing the much needed flexibility to reach this accord which once again abundantly made it clear that it is only through negotiations that complex matters can be sorted out and that the war only brings sufferings to the civilians. Had this been realized much earlier, the people of Afghanistan had not suffered that much and the US would also not have to spend billions of dollars in its longest ever war.

The peace deal has basically four points: a timeline of 14 months for the withdrawal of all US and NATO troops from Afghanistan; a Taliban guarantee that Afghan soil will not be used as a launch-pad that would threaten the security of US; the launch of intra-Afghan negotiations by March 10 and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. One expects in the greater interest of the Afghan people that both the sides will stick to the points of the deal and avoid any sort of violence as doing so will lead to ground zero and amount to rubbing salt on the wounds of Afghan people. This deal has opened a window of opportunity and it is now up to the Afghan people especially its political leadership to seize this opportunity and take the country towards permanent peace which in fact will open doors of progress and prosperity for them. The history will never forgive them if they missed this opportunity that is now knocking at their door. There is an understanding that the intra-Afghan dialogue will be more complicated and that the path is not very easy one. What needs to be remembered by the Afghan government and the Taliban is that this war has not given anything to their people but miseries and backwardness. To reverse this, they will have to demonstrate greater maturity, farsightedness, compassion and elasticity whilst rising above their personal interests. It is only for the Afghans themselves which kind of future they map out for themselves but other countries especially the US, Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia and Qatar need to stay engaged with the Afghan

government and the Taliban to make the intra-Afghan dialogue a success, especially their role will be more important in case of any impasse. They should use their influence in whatever way they could so that these negotiations do not hit any gridlock rather reach the conclusion at the earliest with a governance structure and power sharing formula acceptable for all. Spoilers which up till now are using Afghanistan as a proxy especially against Pakistan will make all out efforts to disrupt this process.

It is a matter of satisfaction that there is a growing realization about the danger which exists to derail the peace process. Whilst welcoming the peace deal, Prime Minister Imran Khan, whose point stand vindicated on the Afghan situation, very rightly and emphatically said that the stakeholders must ensure that spoilers are kept at bay. Under any circumstances, no incident should be allowed to undermine the process as the enemy of peace will definitely make last ditch efforts by resorting to violence and terrorist acts to create confusion and uncertainty. In fact, it will be a test case for Afghan government and the Taliban as to how much commitment they show to the dialogue and successfully foil their nefarious designs for a better future of their people which will ultimately also see the return of Afghan refugees to their homeland especially from Pakistan. Without much international support, Pakistan has generously hosted these Afghan refugees over the last many decades. Hosting refugees is a responsibility that has not been equitably shared. These were also the sentiments expressed by the UN Secretary General during a moot of refugees in Islamabad. Anyhow if the things go as planned for peace, the international community will also have to come forward in a big manner and extend full support to the Afghan government in the reconstruction phase in order to create a pull factor for the return of these millions of refugees to their homeland.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/historic-peace-deal/>

# **US-Taliban Deal Brings Hope of End to Afghan War By Katrina Manson**

US president Donald Trump declared that talks with the Taliban were “dead” in September. But after nine halting rounds of negotiations, the US signed a peace deal with Taliban leaders on Saturday aiming to secure the withdrawal of all US and allied troops from Afghanistan. However on Sunday, there were already signs that the fragile breakthrough would be hard to keep alive.

What are the terms of the deal?

The US has agreed to withdraw all its military forces from Afghanistan, including contractors, trainers and advisers, within 14 months. All coalition partners, including Nato, will also withdraw their 39,000 troops in this timeframe.

Washington will start with a reduction of about 4,000 troops within 135 days, bringing the total remaining to 8,600, along with a proportional reduction by allied and coalition forces. The US will seek UN Security Council endorsement for the deal and push to remove all sanctions against the Taliban by August 27. As part of the deal, up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners are to be released by March 10, with the rest to be freed three months after that.

In return, Taliban leaders have pledged to break with al-Qaeda. They have also agreed to start intra-Afghan talks with the country’s politicians and civil society to reach a permanent ceasefire and the Taliban’s inclusion in the Afghan government.

Will women’s and minority rights be upheld?

The deal is silent on this matter. The Taliban describes itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and wants Afghans to live under its version of sharia law. It is unclear how its inclusion at the heart of Afghan government could accommodate women and girls, who now make up 39 per cent of Afghan schoolgoers. Under five years of Taliban rule that ended with the US invasion of 2001, women were banned from work and education, were required to wear burkas in public and subjected to forced underage marriage.

Any deal will also seek to address the historical grievances of the three main ethnic groups — Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara. A senior Pakistani official warned that past peace arrangements had fallen apart when community leaders “clamoured for their share of the power structure and resources”.

What are the next steps?

Mr Trump said he would “be meeting personally with Taliban leaders in the not-too-distant future”, adding he hoped the group would continue to “kill terrorists” — a reference to the Taliban’s own war against Isis in Afghanistan.

Afghan negotiators are due to convene further talks on March 10 in Oslo to discuss a political transition, but US officials have said time and location could shift. One of the stumbling blocks is that persuading the government in Kabul to release Taliban prisoners by that date, a pre-condition for intra-Afghan talks.

On Sunday, Afghan president Ashraf Ghani said he had made “no commitment” to release prisoners before the intra-Afghan talks start — threatening to scupper negotiations before they begin.

Some analysts say that intra-Afghan talks have little chance of success. The Taliban would ‘naturally’ return to jihad if the US violates the deal

Besides a commitment from the Taliban to seek a lasting ceasefire, negotiators have yet to agree an agenda for the talks or even confirm their involvement. US officials said they expected Taliban, women, opposition, political and religious leaders to be involved in talks at some level, but the government had yet to pick its national team.

It is also unclear how the Taliban could be integrated into the Afghan security apparatus and how the army, police and intelligence services would be affected.

Antipathy to Mr Ghani from Abdullah Abdullah — the opposition politician who refused to recognise his election victory and threatened to set up a parallel government until the US last week dissuaded him — is also complicating the political transition.

The deal also commits the US to supporting the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, which has oil and various mineral deposits, including gold, copper and marble.

Is this the end of the war?

Far from it. Both al-Qaeda and Isis, who have fighters in Afghanistan, are opposed to the deal. British officials said there was a possibility that these groups might seek to exploit the distraction caused by the agreement. In particular, they suggested that the changing dynamics between allied forces and Afghan security forces could give jihadis space to operate more effectively.

US officials also fear Taliban fighters, including some of the thousands the Taliban want released from prison, could continue their association with al-Qaeda or even join Isis, the group's foe.

It also remains unclear whether Pakistan will refuse safe haven to any groups that threaten US security, as the deal only covers Afghan soil. The US has thanked Pakistan for its support, however, which included releasing the Taliban's lead negotiator from prison at the request of the US in 2018.

The US said its troop withdrawal was conditional on the Taliban meeting its commitments. The Taliban leadership has been at pains to demonstrate it can control its fighters. But some observers cautioned the week-long relative calm before the deal was too short.

Some analysts also say that intra-Afghan talks have little chance of success. The Taliban would "naturally" return to jihad if the US violates the deal, one spokesperson told the FT.

Additional reporting by Stephanie Findlay in New Delhi and Farhan Bokhari in Islamabad, and Helen Warrell in London

Source: <https://www.ft.com/content/4a2947b2-5b28-11ea-b0ab-339c2307bcd4>

## **Global Approach to Coronavirus | Editorial**

CHINA'S well-considered opinion that Coronavirus is a global challenge and should be treated as such is proving right with the spread of the deadly virus to all continents of the world and multilateral institutions as well as individual countries firming up short, medium and long term plans to fight the menace. After World Bank's announcement of launching of a \$12 billion programme to help poor nations deal with the health and economic consequences of the epidemic, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday announced a \$ 50 billion aid package. Global central banks have also initiated coordinated action to deal with the consequences of the outbreak of the disease.

Latest reports from across the globe reveal as the number of fresh cases in China is decreasing, other countries are reporting a sharp increase. The scale with which the Chinese Government started the campaign to brace the challenge is paying off and number of suspected infections in China fell to the lowest level since late January, at 520 cases — down from nearly 29,000 suspected cases reported in early February. There are close to one hundred thousand confirmed cases of the Coronavirus around the world, and the outbreak has spread to thirty countries in six continents. Italy is worst affected after China where 28 more people died on Wednesday, the highest single-day total, prompting the authorities to close down educational institutions and deciding to play all football matches without fans. Saudi Arabia too is taking all sorts of precautionary measures including latest ban on its own citizens on performing Umrah, raising concerns about what would happen to annual Hajj. The speed with which the virus is spread to different corners of the globe is alarming and there is surely need for greater cooperation among states to tackle the challenge effectively. It is appreciable that China, which has demonstrated its ability to overcome the problem in a short span of time, has expressed its readiness to provide all possible assistance to other countries in dealing with the threat. The difficulties of the poor and lower middle income countries would multiply as they have not enough resources to spare when healthcare system in those countries is already in a shambles. In this backdrop, the announcement of IMF to provide interest-free loans to countries is a welcoming development. However, this would increase the burden of loans on them and the most viable approach would be provision of grants and medical assistance to the affected but poor countries.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/global-approach-to-coronavirus/>

# **The Day After Putin By Stephen Sestanovich**

Who will rule Russia when Vladimir Putin is gone? The Russian president recently reignited speculation about his succession plans by proposing a series of constitutional changes, on which parliament will vote next week, and by installing Mikhail Mishustin, a near-anonymous technocrat who for years headed the country's tax service, as his new prime minister. Some experts predict Putin will step down before his fourth and final term ends in 2024; others insist he aims to create a new position enabling him to evade term limits and rule indefinitely. Everyone wonders whether Mishustin is the cipher he seems or a successor in waiting. Nobody, to say the very least, has any idea.

One reason so much analysis of Russia's future reveals so little is that journalists, businesspeople, diplomats, and scholars—myself included—have too often asked the wrong questions. We focus too much on Putin himself, on his personality, his wealth, his approval ratings, his secret schemes. And we pay too little attention to the institutions that today define the Russian state. Putin's single biggest achievement in two decades in power—his true legacy—has been to reempower the state bureaucracy. He has paid salaries on time, increased budgets, let the government control a larger share of the national economy, and looked the other way as officials abused their power. No part of this bureaucratic apparatus matters more than the national security establishment—the vast, hydra-headed complex of military, intelligence, and law enforcement ministries. These institutions may well determine not only who becomes the next president of Russia but what Russian politics will look like after Putin.

## REVENGE OF THE DEEP STATE

For decades before the communist order collapsed, Soviet officials assured Americans that the military, intelligence, and law enforcement bureaucracies deferred fully to the “civilian” authority of the Communist Party. It may even have been true. But now that a former KGB officer and head of state security has run the country for more than 20 years, that picture of how the system works badly needs updating.

Consider what would happen if Putin dropped dead tomorrow. The succession process would at first probably follow the constitution, which says that the prime

minister—Mishustin, in this case—becomes the acting president. Within 90 days, an election would be held for a new president, to serve a full six-year term. But that is not all that would happen. Soon after taking over as acting president, Mishustin would be on the phone to some of the people whose help he would need to win the election. Among them would be the heads of what Russians call the “power ministries”—the Interior Ministry, the Defense Ministry, the recently formed National Guard, and the intelligence and security services. (Mishustin tacitly acknowledged the importance of these institutions in one of his first actions as prime minister—doubling the pay of law enforcement personnel who deal with public disturbances.)

To anyone who knows Russian history (or who saw *The Death of Stalin*, the 2017 comedy about the Soviet dictator’s demise and its aftermath), it may seem obvious that the power ministries will play an important role in any succession scenario. From compromising information and behind-the-scenes threats to truncheons and even tanks, they have a lot to offer a new president trying to consolidate power. But their impact reaches far beyond succession itself: how the Russian system evolves after Putin will depend on whether a new president—regardless of who it is—gets these institutions to do what he wants or whether they get him to do what they want.

Russia’s power ministries have come to form a kind of “deep state”—in the same sense that Turks, Egyptians, and Pakistanis intend when they use that phrase to capture the outsize role that men in uniform play in their countries. Russians rarely speak of the deep state, but they talk all the time about the *siloviki*, a term some Western experts translate as “guys with guns.” It refers to a network of institutions whose leaders see themselves as responsible for assuring political continuity and social order (as well as their own privileged positions in that order). The *siloviki*’s institutions operate with considerable autonomy alongside the democratic play-acting of Russian politics. During Putin’s long tenure, these institutions have claimed, both legitimately and corruptly, a growing share of national resources and wealth. And they are almost never overruled by “civilians.”

Putin has brought the Russian deep state roaring back to life.

Grasping the role of Russia’s deep state has been made more difficult by competing conceptions of what Putinism is all about. We have been too impressed, for example, by its populist features. Putin is often lumped together

with demagogic authoritarians such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán or Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Like them, he appeals to religious and cultural traditions and to national identity. But in Russia, these themes are mostly decorative and have little impact on how the country is actually run. The comparison to Erdoğan is particularly inapt. From the moment he was elected, Erdoğan saw the secular-minded generals of the Turkish deep state as an unacceptable check on his autonomy. Through co-optation, confrontation, and even imprisonment, he has largely broken their power. Putin, by contrast, has brought the Russian deep state roaring back to life.

Putin has further misled us by claiming to have restored top-down management to Russian state institutions—what he calls the “vertical of power.” He wants credit for the sharp contrast between his management style and the bureaucratic disorder and dysfunction that preceded him. But whether or not full vertical control was ever his goal, it is far from certain that he has achieved it. Empowering bureaucrats at all levels of the Russian state has ended up meaning the same thing it has meant for centuries—abundant opportunities to create self-dealing fiefdoms and ignore orders from above.

Even Putin occasionally acknowledges the limits of his authority. He spent much of his January State of the Union address—the same speech in which he outlined his plan for constitutional reform—complaining that government ministries had failed to spend enough of the funds he allocated for so-called national projects (big-ticket programs to deal with infrastructure, education, digital innovation, and more). The result was a 2019 federal budget surplus of 1.9 percent of GDP—a mind-boggling amount that slowed last year's economic growth and made Putin understandably angry. He had told the bureaucrats he wanted a big fiscal stimulus. For whatever reason, they didn't give him one.

Putin doesn't generally complain that the siloviki defy him, of course. That would be embarrassing. But we should wonder about the reach of his power—and what it says about the system his successor will attempt to master. Take the dramatic 2015 murder of the well-known opposition leader Boris Nemtsov on a bridge just outside the Kremlin. Chechen thugs were convicted of the crime, but few, in Russia or beyond, believed they were the real masterminds. At no level of Russian law enforcement was there an appetite to go after those who were ultimately responsible.

Was that, as some Western commentators charged, because Putin himself ordered the hit? Perhaps. But it is more likely that the cover-up reflected the uneasy—and far from secret—mutual accommodation between the Moscow police and various criminal organizations, Chechen mafiosi among them. Russia's police have a complicated and profitable relationship with organized crime, and they don't want others—not even Putin—butting in. Seen this way, the next Russian president's job may be less about controlling the vertical of power than about understanding when it and its many horizontal outgrowths are best left alone.

Whether they are using exotic poisons, stealing emails, or assassinating politicians outside his office, the siloviki know Putin has their back.

Similar questions about Putin's control of the deep state arise from a strange episode in Russia's intervention in Syria—a story that still has many analysts scratching their heads. In early 2018, a Russian mercenary outfit known as the Wagner Group launched an attack on U.S. and Kurdish units in eastern Syria. In so doing, it crossed an established “deconfliction” line that American and Russian military officers had agreed on so as to stay out of each other's way. Finding their own troops under attack, U.S. commanders warned their Russian counterparts that they intended to strike back. But even though the Wagner Group had close personal ties to the Kremlin (its leader is nicknamed “Putin's chef,” and the company had a Russian government contract for its activities in Syria), the Russian military high command did nothing to ease the confrontation. Punishing U.S. airstrikes ensued. By failing to prevent the killing of many Wagner Group mercenaries, Russian military officers sent an unmistakable message: No matter how well connected they are, other people should stay out of our business.

Once the conflicting interests that animate different parts of Russia's military, intelligence, and law enforcement complex become clear, many Kremlin actions and choices that have been treated as Putin's own need to be reexamined. In some cases, the president will be fully involved and in control. In others, he may choose a broad direction but let others handle the follow-through. In still other cases, he may know little of deep state doings until they blow up in the headlines.

Is there any way to know which case is which? Can we say, for example, that Putin ordered the attempted 2018 murder in the United Kingdom of the former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter? Or whether the Defense Ministry

alerted him that the new cruise missile it has been testing over the past decade violated the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty? Or exactly how much Putin knew of the 2016 hacking of the Democratic National Committee?

Clues of various kinds (and sometimes highly classified intelligence) can help to answer these questions, but usually analysts have to settle for mere guesswork. The enormous size and divergent interests of the power ministries enable Russian officials at all levels to pursue their private agendas. Putin, moreover, has shown that he always stands behind his people. They don't have to worry about getting into trouble just because they don't get his approval in advance. Whether they are using exotic poisons, stealing emails, or assassinating politicians outside his office, the siloviki know Putin has their back. They will want the same of whoever succeeds him.

## THE STRUGGLE AHEAD

This system—solidly in place after two decades of Putin—could make the coming transfer of power turbulent. Unlike the Turkish, Egyptian, or Pakistani version of the deep state, Russia's version is too divided to have a single leader or spokesman, much less to install its own man in the Kremlin. General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi became president of Egypt in 2013 simply because he was the army's senior officer. Russia's military, intelligence, and law enforcement complex has no senior officer. Yet its pluralism also makes it hard to subdue. Especially under a new president—likely to be weaker than Putin—many different institutions will be able to defend both their turf and the policy control that makes that turf so valuable.

Competition among elements of the deep state could, in an extreme case, turn violent. But even if the struggle stays peaceful, the price Russia's next leader will have to pay for the siloviki's support could be steep. The power ministries may want expanded autonomy, bigger budgets, perhaps even a greater say on issues beyond their existing domains. Mishustin surely knows that his pay increase for riot police won't be the last inducement he offers the power ministries.

There is a warning in all of this for whoever becomes Russia's next president. Taking on the deep state will be difficult, but failing to do so will mean accepting strict limits on presidential authority. In dealing with this dilemma, Putin's successor will have several broad options. He could accept, at least at first, what the power ministries ask of him. He could try to play different institutions against

each other in an effort to carve out more autonomy for himself. Or he could pursue some version of the bargain Putin proposed to Russia's leading oligarchs soon after he became president in 2000: I'll let you run your businesses, you let me run the country.

A final option would be to challenge the deep state and try to cut it down to size. This approach would be the boldest, the riskiest, and probably the most tumultuous. But it can't be ruled out. Although deep states last a long time, they are not eternal. Periodically, they fall prey to domestic power struggles, losing their legitimacy, sense of purpose, and autonomy. (Just ask Erdogan's generals.)

A less personalized, more institutionally focused public assessment of how the Russian system works won't just provide a better indication of what the future holds; it can be part of the United States' policy response. By obsessing so much about Putin himself—who has, alas, usually been the most popular part of his own system—all of us have made it easier for him to persuade his public that Western governments and societies are incorrigibly hostile to their country. If that is what ordinary Russians believe, they will be even less likely to turn against the deep state, even though it is among the least popular—and most predatory—components of Putinism. Only if our objections to Russian policy are taken more seriously by Russians themselves can they help spark the internal debate that will be needed for an eventual change of course. To do that, we need to start with a cool assessment of Russia's institutions, one that its own citizens can recognize and that speaks to their own concerns.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2020-03-04/day-after-putin>

# **Afghanistan Post-Withdrawal By Aneela Shahzad**

A United Nations report released on February 22 acknowledged that “more than 100,000 civilians have been killed or hurt in the last 10 years” in Afghanistan, since the UN started counting. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan said, “Almost no civilian in Afghanistan has escaped being personally affected in some way by the ongoing violence.”

It does shock us that how the UN, despite being the most resourceful international organisation, remained oblivious to the first eight years of intense bombing and raids into Afghan villages. Perhaps the gap can be filled with Professor Gideon Polya’s book, *Body Count: Global Avoidable Mortality Since 1950*, wherein he estimated that the “total avoidable Afghan deaths since 2001 under ongoing war and occupation-imposed-deprivation amount to around 3 million people, about 900,000 of whom are infants under five”.

One thinks why so much bloodshed? What does the United States get in return for so much human misery? It is interesting to note that according to UN reports, Afghanistan has consistently been the producer of 90% of the world’s illicit opiates since 2001, the year the US invaded the land. A 2015 study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that Afghan opiates trafficked to only Western Europe through the Balkans amounted to some \$28 billion per year. Ironically, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the US has appropriated \$9.01 billion of US taxpayers’ money for counternarcotic efforts in Afghanistan since 2002 — an amount literally taken to do ‘nothing’. Not to say that some miscreant US officials or perhaps the thousands of contractors, who are not bound in any “conduct of war”, may have managed to take shares from the \$28 billion too.

But surely, this sidekick is nothing compared to the riches that Afghanistan hides beneath its soil, which are estimated to be at least three trillion dollars in natural resources. These resources include rich natural gas reserves in northern Afghanistan; huge reserves of coal, copper, gold, iron ore and other precious metals, and lithium (a metal used in rechargeable batteries in electric cars) deposits in the Helmand province. The lithium-ion battery market is expected to

grow to \$93 billion in 2025. Germany, China or the US, whoever gets a dig of this lithium, will be leading the automobile industry in the coming decades.

That is why signing a deal with the Taliban has been so painful for the US. With the Taliban's persistent demand of "complete withdrawal", the US not only loses its ground on this geostrategic pivot, which if kept as a terra nullius, or "nobody's land", could be used by the US as a jumping pad into Central Asia. It could allow the US to have a combat presence very close to Russia, China and India, and could help the US manipulate industrial growth for decades to come.

On the other hand, the Taliban have been extending a warm hand towards China. In 2016, the Taliban announced that "all its Mujahideen would help in the security of national projects that are in the higher interest of Islam and the country", including Mes Aynak, the three billion dollar mining project the Afghan government had signed over to China's state-owned Metallurgical Group Corporation, in 2008. Since then, China has become party to the Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the Kabul Process; and the Afghanistan Contact Group of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has been reinvigorated.

Going a step further, China has reportedly built a military base in Badakhshan to counter any insurgency spillover from either side. So, is the Taliban insisting on a "zero" coalition troops on the one hand and allowing a little bit of the Chinese army in? In fact, zero US troops will also mean zero Indian presence, as India has been one of the players that never sought to befriend the Taliban, and hence has zero scope in a Taliban-Afghanistan. Or perhaps it was the Taliban who have had "zero tolerance" for India!

In fact, this eventual peace deal signed on February 29, seems to be bridging an Afghanistan/Pakistan/China corridor in the region. A bridge that would be a better compromise for both Russia and Iran. Russia, in its open hostilities with the US and a working alliance with China, would prefer a pro-China Kabul over a pro-US one. And Iran, who has just experienced India's betrayal when it stopped buying Iranian oil in May last year, as Trump put more sanctions on Iran, would side by China too, who has kept its bilateral trade amidst the sanctions.

So, what does this tell us about the rag-tagged Taliban, who have resisted the US military complex with mere rifles and shoulder-held stingers for about two decades? What does this tell us about 21st century warfare? Have the Taliban

defeated the Fourth Generation Warfare — the drones and the A-10 Warthog fighter jets? Indeed, the most powerful weapon in the hands of the Taliban was their resolve to stand and defend their land, while refusing all bribes and disregarding intimidation, and ensuring that the only victory they accepted was a complete victory.

This is also a victory of Pakistan's diplomacy, which stood behind the genuine Afghan struggle for the country's freedom. And a bitter defeat of India's diplomacy, which stood behind the pro-occupation Kabul regime. India was with the Soviets when they had occupied Afghanistan. So India's investment in the country has been double that of the US. Yet, it was a wrong investment aimed at Afghanistan's resources minus the human element. Bad choices and a shameful retreat from Afghanistan has made India's Hindutva regime more jittery as it realises that after losing Afghanistan to China and Pakistan, India will be more vulnerable to economic isolation in the region and to strategic pressure in Kashmir.

Perhaps that is why, General Bipin has announced a "separate theatre command for Jammu and Kashmir" — a small valley already smeared with over 700,000 Indian troops.

History has been written with this US-Afghan peace deal. Another superpower has faced a humiliating retreat from the "graveyard of empires".

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2170206/6-afghanistan-post-withdrawal/>

# **Pompeo's Turkish Gambit Fails in Syria By** **Matthew Petti**

Russia and Turkey announced a ceasefire agreement for Syria on Thursday afternoon that directly rebukes U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's demands earlier in the day—dashing U.S. hopes that Turkey could help roll back Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's control of the country.

Pompeo told reporters on Thursday morning that it was a U.S. "requirement" for Assad to return to 2018 ceasefire lines in northwest Syria after weeks of fighting between Turkish and pro-Assad forces. Only a few hours later, Turkey agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire along the existing front lines in northwest Syria, which cements Assad's post-2018 military gains.

The agreement ended Pompeo's latest attempt to forge a U.S.-Turkish alliance against Assad, who is backed by Iran and Russia.

The Trump administration has sought to expel all Iranian forces from Syria since former National Security Advisor John Bolton declared it a U.S. policy goal in September 2018. In recent months, the State Department has stepped up its attempts to force Iran out by bringing down Assad through both diplomatic and military pressure.

"We think there are increasing incentives both for the Russians and for the Syrians for Iran's presence to decline," said Brian Hook, the State Department official overseeing Iranian affairs, at an event hosted by AI Monitor on February 28. "The United States and our partners will be withholding reconstruction assistance in Syria unless certain conditions are met."

He added that "Assad was on his back foot" at the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, blaming Iranian intervention for aiding and abetting Assad's "slaughter of half a million Muslims."

Hook did not address Turkey's role in the country, but other U.S. diplomats were quietly working to back a Turkish military offensive against Assad in northwest Syria.

Amb. James Jeffrey, the State Department official overseeing Syrian affairs, appeared in Idlib on March 3 alongside Amb. Kelly Craft, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Jeffrey promised to support Turkey with both ammunition and intelligence.

“We have a very, very big foreign military sales program, much of the Turkish military uses American equipment,” he told reporters. “We will make sure that the equipment is ready.”

The two-pronged plan to pressure Assad gained momentum in January 2019. Congress passed a sanctions bill allowing the State Department to renew diplomatic pressure against Assad. At the same time, Assad was launching a military assault to retake Idlib, the last rebel-held province of Syria.

Turkey bolstered its peacekeeping presence in Syria as a last-ditch attempt to stop Assad’s operations, which violated a 2018 ceasefire agreement brokered by Turkey—and threatened to send hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to the Turkish border.

The Syrian strongman and his Russian backers doubled down, killing dozens of Turkish troops in February. Turkish forces responded by pounding Assad’s armored units with drones and reportedly targeting Russian aircraft with shoulder-fired missiles. Iran’s military, normally silent on Idlib, warned that Turkish troops were within the range of Iranian guns.

It was the most serious escalation between Turkey, Russia, and Iran to date. Turkey has long backed anti-Assad rebels but it has also cooperated closely with Iran and Russia to create ceasefire agreements and “de-escalation zones” in Syria.

Turkish leaders requested U.S. support in defending their airspace after the February escalation.

The request reopened a longstanding debate within the Trump administration over U.S. relations with Turkey. Jeffrey reportedly pushed to send Patriot missiles to bolster Turkey’s air defenses, against objections from the Department of Defense.

U.S. military leadership has been at odds with the Turkish government over a variety of issues, including Syria, where the United States and Turkey see each other's partners as problematic.

State Department officials had attempted to foster a coalition between the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led coalition and Turkish-backed Islamist rebels in 2019 but the scheme collapsed after Turkey launched a military campaign against the Syrian Kurds in October 2019.

That same month, U.S. forces killed Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Idlib, and assassinated several Islamic State officials in a Turkish-occupied corner of Syria.

Col. Myles Caggins, the spokesman for the U.S.-led counterterrorism coalition, referred to Idlib as a "magnet for terrorist groups" in a February interview, even as he called for Assad to halt his offensive.

Pompeo seemed to double down on Jeffrey's position at Thursday's press briefing.

"The Turkish Government has asked us for a handful of things. We're evaluating all of those requests," he said. "We believe firmly that our [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] partner Turkey has the full right to defend itself against the risk that's being created by what Assad, the Russians, and the Iranians are doing."

Matthew Petti is a national security reporter at the National Interest. Follow him on Twitter: @Matthew\_Petti.

Source: [https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/pompeo%E2%80%99s-turkish-gambit-fails-syria-130147?](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/pompeo%E2%80%99s-turkish-gambit-fails-syria-130147?hpid=hp-top-news-story%3A-pompeo-turkey-syria%3A-%3Ahomepage%2Fstory)

# **What Comes After the Middle East Peace Process? By Khalil Shikaki**

US. President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan, released on January 28, marks the effective end of the Oslo era of Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking. It makes no reference to international law or to a mutually binding commitment to international resolutions aimed at ending the conflict. It ignores the commitments made by both sides under existing agreements, and it builds on none of the progress made by American, Israeli, and Palestinian negotiators over the past 20 years. Instead, it proposes a real estate transaction: Israel receives a large chunk of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, and the Palestinians receive financial compensation; their vital needs for sovereignty and for independence are, among other things, disregarded.

Although Trump's plan pays lip service to a two-state solution, it gives Israel control of Jerusalem as its "undivided" capital and control over security in the West Bank. It allows Israel to annex 30 percent of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, turning the Palestinian entity into several unconnected enclaves inside the state of Israel. It rejects the principle of the right of return for Palestinian refugees and gives Israel veto power over their resettlement in the Palestinian entity.

The U.S. plan was designed to be implemented with or without a Palestinian partner.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the deal outright and later threatened to sever relations with Israel in protest. Any other response would have discredited the leadership of the already unpopular PA and ensured a public backlash against it. Yet Abbas's denunciation of the deal was apparently not emphatic enough for the Palestinian public: by early February, Abbas's approval rating had declined five points, to a measly 37 percent satisfaction rate. But because the U.S. plan was designed to be implemented with or without a Palestinian partner, Abbas's response didn't matter anyway; the deal was rigged to ensure the Palestinians' failure, regardless of their response.

**DAMNED IF HE DOES**

Abbas can't accept the U.S. plan as a basis for negotiations without risking unrest and possibly removal. But he can end relations with Israel only if he is willing to risk the collapse of the PA and the eruption of Palestinian-Israeli violence. His threat to sever relations with Israel lacks credibility; over the past decade, Abbas has made similar threats, and Israel's leaders have called his bluff each time.

Abbas probably hopes the threat will buy him time to calm the angry Palestinian public. February polls show that 94 percent of Palestinians reject the plan and that support for the two-state solution has declined to 39 percent, the lowest since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993. Difficult compromises that received tangible support in the past—including land swaps, refugee resettlement, the sharing of Jerusalem's Old City, and special security arrangements in the Jordan Valley—are increasingly becoming taboo because they are now associated with Trump and his plan.

Admittedly, public opinion among the Palestinians and the Israelis was not a force for peace before Trump's plan was announced; now, however, it is increasingly becoming an impediment to peace. On the Israeli side, Trump's plan emboldens the Israeli right wing and creates greater expectations that a peace plan must meet Israel's maximum, rather than minimum, demands on all issues related to the conflict. On the Palestinian side, the demand for a one-state solution had already begun to intensify as a result of settlement expansion, the turn toward right-wing politics in Israel, the rise of Hamas, and the failure of the Palestinian leadership to effectively challenge the status quo; as of February, 61 percent of Palestinians thought that the two-state solution was no longer feasible, and 37 percent favored abandoning the idea and demanding a one-state solution instead.

Demand for violence among Palestinians is likely to increase once the U.S. plan is implemented.

Over the last 15 years, Palestinian violence against Israel has been kept under control, particularly in the West Bank. Public rejection of violence by the Palestinians, the rebuilding of a highly effective PA security sector that has cooperated with the Israeli army and security services to enforce order, and the elimination of Hamas's military infrastructure in the West Bank have all helped keep the peace. But the demand for violence among the Palestinians is likely to increase once the U.S. plan is implemented. Already, the February poll findings

show that 64 percent of Palestinians would support violence as an answer to the Trump plan. The annexation of Palestinian territory, large-scale settlement construction and the expansion of existing settlements in areas already annexed by Israel, and the change in the status quo in Jerusalem are just a few of the measures put forth in the plan that are likely to increase support among the Palestinians for violence. These developments will probably trigger the militarization of Fatah, or at least of its youth movement, and the rebuilding of Hamas's military infrastructure. Organized and sustained violence will most likely follow.

This grim future is not inevitable. On the Palestinian side, Abbas and his Arab allies can respond to Trump's plan with a detailed joint counterproposal, one that builds on the progress already achieved in past rounds of negotiations and in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, and one that benefits from the covert Israeli-Arab coalition-building efforts of the past three years. Nurtured by the Trump administration, these efforts were triggered by a rising Arab concern, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, about the regional threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions, a concern strongly shared by Israel. The cooperation achieved during these discussions may boost confidence and help reduce Israel's concerns about withdrawing its army from the West Bank.

The Trump plan's disregard for previous progress made during Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations is no accident. Those who designed the plan seem to have concluded that concessions made by Israel in previous rounds of negotiations between 2000 and 2014, including those made by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, are unacceptable to American evangelicals and to right-wing pro-Israel supporters of the Trump administration. Furthermore, the plan demands more concessions from the Palestinians, some of which were not seen as vital to previous Israeli governments, including Netanyahu's government. Now, more than ever, Netanyahu's political survival depends on support from Israel's most extreme national-religious settlers and ultra-Orthodox political parties.

#### A PALESTINIAN COUNTERPROPOSAL

It is therefore essential that the Palestinian side outlines areas of previous Palestinian-Israeli agreement. The Palestinian counterproposal should build on existing documents, such as the Clinton parameters (the compromises laid out, in December 2000, by U.S. President Bill Clinton), as well as the 2008 paper drafted by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, documenting the progress

and areas of disagreement between the two sides during the Annapolis process. The counterproposal must also identify Palestinian vital needs in the areas in which disagreement exists—for example, on the size and locations of the territorial swap—and explain why the Palestinian positions in these areas pose no threat to Israel’s vital needs. In coordination with the major Arab countries, the Palestinian leadership should outline a detailed timetable and framework for a regional vision of peace that integrates Israel into the region’s political, economic, and security infrastructure. This element of the joint Palestinian-Arab response should provide a narrative illustrating the direct benefits of peace to Israel and the region.

Such a response would likely find support among Israelis who seek to preserve Israel’s Jewish and democratic character. It would also likely find support in Europe and among Democrats in the United States. A Democratic U.S. president, if one is elected later this year, could put the Trump plan aside, lay out a new proposal for bridging the gap between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and provide a more evenhanded U.S. policy to resolve the conflict. In contrast, Trump’s reelection would probably doom any chance for Palestinian-Israeli peace, particularly if the next Israeli government is controlled by the right-wing Likud Party and its more extreme partners among the religious parties. In such a scenario, the PA would have no choice but to embark on a gradual process of dissolution, leading eventually to an irreversible, de facto one-state reality.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-03-06/what-comes-after-middle-east-peace-process?>

# **U.S.-Chinese Distrust Is Inviting Dangerous Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories By Yanzhong Huang**

Tens of thousands of people get sick. More than 2,900 die. Fear spreads faster than the virus. Factories are closed. Roads are blocked. Villages are sealed off. Cities are locked down. The outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is the most severe sociopolitical crisis Chinese leaders have grappled with since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. And the crisis is not confined to China. The spread of the virus across borders—and the panicky reaction to that spread—will have profound effects on the global economy, politics, security, and governance.

The virus's novelty leaves many unknowns. We still don't have a clear idea of its transmissibility and virulence. We do not have a clear idea of the incubation period, which could last up to 24 days. We also don't know how infectious people are before their symptoms manifest and why some cases suddenly become severe. We also don't understand why some patients tested positive a second time even after they seemingly recovered.

Rumors thrive on fear and uncertainty, and the outbreak of the novel coronavirus offers plenty of both. Within weeks of the pathogen's appearance, social media lit up with suggestions that the virus was a biological weapon—either a Chinese one that had escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan or an American one inflicted on Wuhan. While such rumors are not credible, given that neither the United States nor China has incentive to develop biological weapons, they are difficult to dispel, because military officials on both sides still view with suspicion each other's motives in building biosecurity programs. Loopholes in China's biosafety regulations only allow the rumors to gain more currency. And the lack of trust between the two nations—as evidenced by China's initial refusal to allow U.S. disease experts to visit Wuhan—is undermining efforts to contain the virus's global spread.

## THE THEORY

From the beginning of the outbreak, the public was informed that the disease originated with human exposure to a virus carried by wild animals. But the

suddenness and mystery of the bug's appearance left fertile ground for speculation, and soon enough, online sources began to advance the claim that the virus was genetically engineered. An unpublished paper authored by Indian scientists seemed to bolster this notion by suggesting that the virus's protein sequence included elements of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Although the authors soon voluntarily withdrew the paper, the proposed linkage caught the attention of websites such as Zero Hedge, which claimed that the novel coronavirus was weaponized by Chinese scientists. Speaking on Fox News, Tom Cotton, the Republican senator from Arkansas, suggested that it could not be ruled out that the virus originated in a lab in Wuhan that is used to handle the most dangerous pathogens.

Zero Hedge has been barred from Twitter, but Chinese social media abounds with conjecture that the virus was engineered by the United States as an agent of biological warfare against China. One widely shared conspiracy theory suggests that American soldiers participating in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan deliberately shed the virus at the Hunan Seafood Market. Contending that "a new type of biological warfare is coming," a retired People's Liberation Army general called for building a permanent biodefense force in China.

The suddenness and mystery of the bug's appearance left fertile ground for speculation.

The current outbreak in China is not the first to be a rumored biological weapons attack. During the 2002–3 SARS epidemic, a Russian scientist claimed that the virus was a mixture of measles and mumps that could be made only in the lab. Many Chinese seized on this notion and speculated that SARS was a genetic weapon developed by the United States to target them alone. The official China Youth Daily linked a National Institutes of Health–sponsored genetic study in China to the U.S. genetic warfare program. In the United States, meanwhile, a China expert suggested that the virus was linked to China's biowarfare program. Yet SARS was by no means a genetic weapon. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, of the 166 reported SARS patients in the United States in 2003, 58 percent were white and 32 percent were Asian.

## THE HISTORY

Just how likely is either the United States or China to be developing deadly biological weapons for use? A tour through the history of such warfare is instructive.

During World War II, the United States developed biological weapons but never used them. Biological agents had certain liabilities for battlefield use: they didn't take effect right away, they could infect one's own forces, they were sensitive to environmental and meteorological conditions, and they could conceivably contaminate an area for longer than intended. Nonetheless, the United States continued to stockpile and develop biological weapons into the postwar era.

Matthew Meselson, a biologist at Harvard University, led a successful campaign against biological weapons development starting in the early 1960s. In 1969, the United States got rid of its offensive biological warfare program and played a crucial role in successfully negotiating an international treaty known as the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). The treaty prohibits the development, production, and stockpiling of biological agents and related delivery systems intended for hostile use. In explaining the U.S. decision, President Richard Nixon commented in 1970 that "we'll never use the damn germs, so what good is biological warfare as a deterrent? If somebody uses germs on us, we'll nuke 'em."

Compared with the United States, China came late to the game. The country had been on the receiving end of germ warfare, on the part of the Imperial Japanese Army's biowarfare Unit 731 during World War II. As a result, China felt an imperative to build research facilities devoted to "defensive" biological warfare. In August 1951, Premier Zhou Enlai set up the Academy of Military Medical Sciences (AMMS) to conduct research on biodefense against "wartime special weapons."

Since China did not possess nuclear weapons until the mid-1960s, it may indeed have explored developing biological weapons as a weapon of last resort or a strategic deterrent similar to nuclear weapons. But by 1982, China had acquired a largely invulnerable retaliatory nuclear arsenal. Two years later, China acceded to the BWC. The timing indicates that China, like the United States, found nuclear weapons to be the more credible and effective deterrent.

The mid-1980s saw a shift in China's national agenda toward economic development. Funding for China's biodefense research facilities dwindled, and they began developing products for civilian rather than military purposes. The AMMS became something of an analog to the U.S. Army Medical Research

Institute of Infectious Diseases. It developed a pan-antimalaria drug called compound benflumentol and registered patents in more than 50 countries. During the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak, AMMS collaborated with Chinese pharmaceutical companies to develop two drugs for treating the deadly disease.

## DISTRUST AND MISPERCEPTIONS

China and the United States are both parties to the BWC, but they still look upon each other with suspicion. Past U.S. government reports have alleged that China continued to possess “an offensive biological warfare capability based on technology developed prior to its accession to the BWC.” According to a former official from the U.S. Department of Defense, by the 1990s China had manufactured and weaponized a wide variety of infectious microorganisms and toxins and had a wide range of delivery means available, including ballistic and cruise missiles. Although these reports and accusations have never been substantiated by open-source evidence, official Chinese publications do suggest sustained and organized biowarfare-related research activity. Official sources reported that in the 1990s, Chinese scientists used rare earth as a medium in which to swiftly cultivate brucellosis (traditionally considered a biological agent suitable for military use).

Many people in China also perceive the United States as a potential biological warfare threat. After the 2002–3 SARS outbreak, some Chinese military experts invoked a scenario of enemies spraying unknown SARS-like viruses on Beijing during airstrikes. Noting that the United States had developed antibiotic-resistant anthrax strains, a leading Chinese military medical expert implied that Washington had weaponized SARS and avian flu virus. In 2001, the administration of President George W. Bush had rejected a proposed protocol to the BWC on the grounds that it was insufficient to its purpose. That refusal convinced some Chinese experts that the United States had renewed its interest in developing biological weapons. In 2007, Chinese military researchers published an article accusing the United States of “using new technologies to develop novel biological weapons agents” and claiming that it was “extremely likely” that anthrax spores in the 2001 attacks on Democratic senators’ offices came from U.S. military labs. Such suspicions might explain why the Chinese government later tightened regulations on foreigners using human genetic material and made it more difficult to pass the material abroad.

The mutual distrust and misperceptions are emblematic of a classic security dilemma, in which actions taken by one state to improve its security lead to reactions from others, which make the original state less secure. Worse, biodefense programs are so opaque, and provoke such moral antipathy, that they encourage “looking-glass presumptions”: when one state is perceived to be pursuing biological weapons, its rivals will likely seek to acquire them as well. During World War II, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom all developed biological weapons because they thought Hitler’s Germany would develop them (it didn’t).

Many in China also perceive the United States as a potential biological warfare threat.

Whether a disease is naturally occurring or deliberately caused can be difficult to tell, because many biological agents are naturally accessible, and their production is of dual use up to the point of weaponization. In the context of frigid bilateral relations, a naturally occurring disease outbreak caused by an unknown pathogen can be easily framed as a bioweapons attack. The historian Alfred Crosby noted that the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic was suspected to have been started by German agents. In 2004, the Indian government accused “promiscuous Pakistanis” of conducting Islamic “jihad terrorism” by deliberately spreading HIV in Kashmir. When H5N1 (“bird flu”) became a major concern worldwide in 2008, Indonesia’s then-health minister, Siti Supari, accused the United States of using virus samples to develop biological weapons and suspended the operation of a U.S. Navy medical research unit in Jakarta.

At a time of deteriorating relations between the United States and China, misperceptions of a hostile origin of COVID-19 have undermined global efforts to tackle the pathogen’s spread. For weeks, China ignored offers of help from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to a blog post published on a website affiliated with Jiefang Daily (the official newspaper of the Shanghai Committee of the Communist Party of China), “Some U.S. CDC experts” might be on a military mission to “spy on China’s virologic research capacity.” Two U.S. experts finally joined the World Health Organization’s delegation to China in February, but the delegation’s field visit did not include the Wuhan Institute of Virology—indeed, Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak, was initially not even on the group’s itinerary.

The claim that the novel coronavirus is a biological weapon is not only harmful but also scientifically unsupported. Scientists have pointed out that mutations in the virus are “completely consistent with natural evolution.” According to The Lancet, scientists from multiple countries have “overwhelmingly” concluded that the novel coronavirus originated in wildlife.

#### AN ACCIDENTAL RELEASE?

Since coronaviruses are zoonotic, which is to say that they jump from animals to humans, scientists believe that they have an animal origin. Most agree that bats are the natural reservoir host for the virus, although snakes for a time were also suspected. Scientists conjecture that pangolins—widely considered a delicacy in China—may be the intermediate host to pass the novel virus to humans. Overall, they are inclined to view the outbreak as a problem of zoonotic infection transmitted from wild animals to humans. While the virus was indeed found in people associated with a wet market (where live animals were sold and slaughtered) as well as in the market environment, some of the early cases were in people who had not visited the market, suggesting that the jumping of species may have occurred elsewhere or earlier.

Another, less supported hypothesis views the outbreak as the result of a biosafety accident in which the coronavirus leaked out from a lab where scientists failed to follow proper decontamination protocol. Supporters of this theory point to the seemingly overwhelming circumstantial evidence that connects the outbreak to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which also houses China’s only biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) lab, the highest level of biosafety precautions. They noted that Dr. Shi Zhengli, a researcher in the lab who has acquired the nickname “Batwoman,” has been actively hunting down the coronavirus and proving that bats are natural reservoirs for SARS-like coronaviruses. Shi has flatly denied that the institute was the source of the novel coronavirus, which she said was rather “nature punishing the human race for keeping uncivilized living habits.”

Other Chinese social media posts focused on the credentials of the director general of the institute, Wang Yani. A widely shared post allegedly written by Rao Yi, a leading Chinese biologist, said Wang had a weak academic background and ascended to her current post through nepotism. On February 17, one post accused Wang of flouting the biosafety rules and selling laboratory animals to wet markets for profit. Another study, conducted by the South China

University of Technology, concluded that the coronavirus “probably” originated in the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention, which is just 280 meters away from the Hunan Seafood Market. The study mentioned that bats linked to coronavirus once attacked a researcher, who had to be self-quarantined because “blood of a bat shot on his skin.” The paper was later removed from ResearchGate, a commercial social-networking site for scientists and researchers to share papers. Thus far, no scientists have confirmed or refuted the paper’s findings.

Many of these accusations may be groundless, but nobody can deny that lab safety is a major concern in China. A safety breach at a Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention lab is believed to have caused four suspected SARS cases, including one death, in Beijing in 2004. A similar accident caused 65 lab workers of Lanzhou Veterinary Research Institute to be infected with brucellosis in December 2019. In January 2020, a renowned Chinese scientist, Li Ning, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for selling experimental animals to local markets.

The government’s actions have lent credibility to the thesis that the coronavirus accidentally escaped a laboratory. In February, China appointed Major General Chen Wei, China’s top biowarfare expert, as head of the BSL-4 laboratory at Wuhan Institute of Virology. Because of Chen’s background, the appointment fueled suspicions about the virus’s possible connection to the BSL-4 lab. Then, on February 14, Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted the need to incorporate shengwu anquan (which in Chinese could mean either “biosecurity” or “biosafety”) into its national security regime.

In the literature of biological warfare, the difference between biosecurity and biosafety is important: the former is about the protection of humans and the environment from the intentional release of pathogens and biohazards, while the latter is about safety from their unintentional release. Xi’s remarks were immediately followed by a Ministry of Science and Technology instruction on strengthening biosafety management in labs handling the novel coronavirus, suggesting that Xi had biosafety in mind when issuing the directive. But the Chinese leader could as easily have been referring to animal agriculture, where biosecurity is broadly defined as everything done to keep disease away from animals and the people that may interact with them. Indeed, just last week, China’s legislature announced a permanent ban on wildlife trade and

consumption in the country, apparently to minimize the chances of diseases passing to humans from animals.

#### AN IMPEDIMENT TO COLLABORATION

The virus is now rapidly spreading worldwide, with social, political, and economic consequences wherever it goes. Identifying its origin would help experts and governments to hone the best countermeasures to stem its spread and prevent such outbreaks in the future.

So far, neither the theory that the virus was developed as a biological weapon nor the notion that it escaped a laboratory by accident seems as plausible as the hypothesis that the virus jumped to humans from animals at the wet market. But the conspiracy theories have poisoned the atmosphere for U.S.-Chinese collaboration in addressing the outbreak, which might otherwise have presented an opportunity to reset the soured relationship.

In order to dispel misperceptions and minimize the damage to future relations, the two countries should consider expanding their military-to-military exchanges, such that they might visit each other's sites for conducting government-sponsored biodefense work. And the United States should explore channels for helping China improve its laboratory biosafety. The beginning of either measure is dialogue.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-03-05/us-chinese-distrust-inviting-dangerous-coronavirus-conspiracy>

## **Modi & Hitler, both guilty of genocide By** **Senator Rehman Malik**

It was a bright day when I visited the city of Linz in Austria where I drove specially to see the birth place of Adolf Hitler. I went to his village where I saw a brick house consisting of two to three rooms, now lying vacant. I spent two days in that village's nearby motel to study the history of this mass killer in the background of his childhood.

According to some very old people of his time who had seen his childhood he was a boy who spent most of his time in the nearby bar fighting. He was completely deprived of feelings, in revenge for the poverty that his family had seen and he had suffered. He was born fourth to six children, but the death of his siblings among which only a sister named Paula lived, made him isolated, introvert and lonely. He moved out of his village and went to Linz, a beautiful city which is not far from the lake, and then how he became Hitler is a matter of history.

During World-War I, he developed interest in politics shaping the Nazi ideology in his mind, so he applied to serve in the German army. He was accepted in August 1914 and deployed in October 1914 to Belgium. Hitler served throughout the Great War and won two decorations for bravery, including the rare Iron Cross First Class, which he wore to the end of his life.

He was basically born to be a cruel man that is why he gravitated towards the army while Modi also moved to an RSS terrorist center whereas his family wanted him to pursue his family life, but he chose to become a militant /extremist. After the war, Hitler joined politics and there he discovered his ability and command over debates, and speeches because his speeches were powerful and people believed what he said. Hitler joined the Nazi party and soon became its leader, whereas Modi left RSS and became the leader of BJP. Hitler promised Germany that if he became a leader, he would restore Germany to greatness in Europe.

In 1933 he was elected Chancellor of Germany, after that, there was nothing that could stop Hitler. On the other hand, Modi has given the commitment to RSS that

he would convert India into Hindu state and promote Hindutva in the country. He had studied his ideal, Benito Mussolini of Italy, about how to install a fascist government and become a dictator, soon Hitler was dictator of Germany from where he engineered the World War II and what he did is known the Holocaust today.

Modi has quite the same past and personality traits as those of Hitler. Having being born in the deprived class the feelings of vengeance are quite similar between both which are fully unfolding with Modi's actions. Modi picked the ideology of Nazis and replicated the same in the form of training with RSS militants. Hitler began with his slogan "Heil Hitler" with raised hands, whereas Modi started with the slogan "Jai Hindutva".

I have discussed this in detail in my book "Modi's War doctrine". Modi butchered Muslims in Gujrat followed by Kashmir and now in Delhi, he reflects that same mindset.

Nazi's Massacre of Jews in Europe by Hitler ended with killing of almost 6 million Jews in World War II. Additional feature introduced by Modi against Muslims through proxy wars is as under where you see the hand of Modi from childhood. Internal conflict in Myanmar 1948–present – he supported Aung San Suu Kyi, Sri Lankan Tamil Insurrection 1983–2009 – RSS was used, Baluchistan conflict 1948–present and RSS mindset with Mukti Bahani model and the Internal Conflict of Chittagong Hills was created by Indian RAW and Modi. In the Nepalese Civil War 1996-2006 RSS activists were used. Now Modi, the symbolic son of Hitler is doing all that Hitler did to butcher people. Under consideration of the Modi's barbarism in Gujarat (2002), Kashmir and now in Delhi, the world is now feeling the existence of Adolf Hitler after witnessing the unsettling similarities between BJP's Modi and Nazi Party's Hitler.

Hitler's Anti-Jews agendas and the violent stances led him towards the bloodshed of hundreds and thousands of Jews shook the world, in the same way, Narendra Modi implemented a similar stance against Muslims and the world has witnessed the Anti-Muslim upholdings in Gujrat, Kashmir and now in Delhi. During World War II, the military branch of the Nazi Party named Waffen-SS fought along with the German Army to provide them a strong support system. Similarly, Rashthiya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) extended its meaningful

support to Indian Army in 1971 against Pakistan and also when the Sino-Indian war was being fought.

The similarities don't end here. The Nazis wanted to eradicate the Jewish people while the BJP wants to get rid of Muslims. Hitler's "Greater Germany" and Modi's "Akhand Bharat" – Greater India, are the ones relating to their vicious criminal activities. The representation of Hitler's Nazi Party and Modi's BJP is also based on the same swastika symbols followed by the same lining patterns which make people wonder about the roots of their alliances. Both the party leaders Adolf Hitler and Narendra Modi even share the same gestures for salutation with bent hand, kept on the chest and tightly straight.

By the magnitude of killings, Nazis killed millions of Jews whereas BJP killed thousands of Muslims where the Nazis were racial/ethnic-based and BJP/RSS are religious-based. While Hitler had taken over much of Europe by 1944, the allies fought back and Germany was on the verge of defeat. Hitler couldn't watch himself losing, so he holed up in a bunker under his headquarters in Berlin where he committed suicide by swallowing a cyanide capsule and shot himself in the head on 30th April 1945. Similarly, Modi has expressed in a few of his speeches that he had come with three cloths and hence he will go back in three-piece of cloths. He perhaps is hinting towards his unnatural death as there is a group of people within RSS including his Home Minister wants to replace him as the leader and as PM and he might meet the same fate as Hitler.

Source : <https://nation.com.pk/07-Mar-2020/modi-hitler-both-guilty-of-genocide>

# **US Continues Its War On The Rest Of The World – OpEd By Margaret Kimberley**

The duopoly corporate parties enforce silence and ignorance on foreign policy to ensure that Americans have neither the knowledge nor the tools to resist their country's policy of endless war.

It isn't clear who the next president of the United States will be but the terrible handiwork of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Donald Trump are creating terrible suffering for millions of people around the world.

Donald Trump is making a big show of a phony peace agreement with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban were given life by Jimmy Carter, who sought to undermine the sovereign government of that country. We were told that the Soviets had invaded when in fact the government of president Najibullah had invited them, an act he had every right to undertake.

What followed was years of civil war, billions of dollars funneled to the mujahadeen, including the likes of Osama bin Laden, who subsequently turned against his sponsors and killed 3,000 Americans on September 11, 2001. No one wanted to remember that bin Laden was originally lauded as a freedom fighter by Carter and Reagan, only to be rubbed out years later by Barack Obama.

Carter began the use of jihadist proxies and all of his predecessors followed in his foot steps. The current turmoil in Syria is a direct result of Obama's turn at creating disaster. Along with his partners in NATO, and Israel, and gulf monarch states, he sought regime change against Bashar al-Assad. Now the Syrians are on the verge of taking back their country with the help of their allies but NATO member Turkey has again proved itself to be treacherous and makes a last stand with its jihadist proxies to continue the suffering of the people there.

The presidential campaign is a farce, as foreign policy is treated like a frill that need not be mentioned. That is because the war party duopoly have no intention of changing U.S. foreign policy in any significant way. The cynical maneuvers continue as Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar drop out in order to help Joe

Biden. Elizabeth Warren hangs on (Note: Warren dropped out earlier Thursday) and the hapless Biden is used to convince fearful black voters that he is the only hope of defeating Trump.

Bernie Sanders may be the most progressive on domestic issues, but his foreign policy positions are no better than those of the men who previously filled the job he hopes to hold. When he isn't calling Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping thugs he is supporting the destruction of Venezuela and other countries targeted by the United States. Tulsi Gabbard questions the regime change concept but she has been barred from debates and is thus rendered invisible to the electorate. Her invisibility is hardly coincidental.

While Democrats sound alike, the Trump administration enters into an agreement with the Taliban to reduce the number of U.S. troops. Trump has a bit of a foreign policy victory, a slight undoing of a 40-year long crime against the Afghan people who have suffered after the U.S. intervened on behalf of jihadists.

This information is rarely shared with the American people. The average voter seldom thinks about foreign policy for the simple reason that they aren't asked to do so. When Syria, Afghanistan or any other far away place breaks into the news cycle they are told little more than that foreign leaders who work with the U.S. are good but that all others are consigned to thuggery.

Americans should know that Turkey's gambit of unleashing refugees into Europe is a direct result of its acting in concert with the U.S. regime change plot. Of course the Europeans now wringing their hands in fear of newcomers went along with the scheme and share in the blame as they continue their role as America's vassal states.

The foreign crises that are treated like background music are in fact very important. No one knows if Turkey's rampage on behalf of the United States can start a hot war that candidates will suddenly have to address.

The consensus for imperialism is no accident. The military industrial complex makes sure that its gravy train continues in Afghanistan and elsewhere and presidential candidates don't even pretend to change a corrupt system. After inauguration day on January 20, 2021 the United States will continue to be the biggest threat to peace in the world. Millions of people will be bombed or

sanctioned and Americans will continue to live in ignorance as they wonder why their country is hated. They need only look at the presidential candidate debate stage to answer the question.

Source: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/06032020-us-continues-its-war-on-the-rest-of-the-world-oped/>

# **COVID-19: Quality Shock To Globalization**

## **– Analysis By Stephen Roach**

Too many governments have made a devil's compact with globalization – prioritizing speed and quantity of economic growth over quality.

With financial markets reeling in the face of a global pandemic, fear and panic have pushed the world to the brink of another crisis. For investors, it was a classic Wylie Coyote moment. Asset prices had been surging just as an increasingly vulnerable global economy was hit with the devastating supply shock of COVID-19.

Predictably, in the pre-virus days of froth, many investors ignored the economic warning signs. In early January, the International Monetary Fund lowered its estimate for world GDP growth in 2019 to just 2.9 percent – the weakest year since 2009 and only 0.4 percentage point above the 2.5 percent global recession threshold. Moreover, the Japanese economy contracted at a 6.3 percent rate in the final period of last year, likely to be worse after revisions, on the heels of yet another consumption tax hike. And industrial activity weakened sharply in Germany and France.

And now comes a full-blown China shock – ironically, also occurring in the aftermath of 6 percent Chinese GDP growth in the fourth quarter of 2019, the slowest pace in 27 years. Weakening economies, whether it is China or another country, are less equipped to cope with a shock than strengthening economies. That points to an important distinction between a booming Chinese economy that was growing by 10 percent in 2003 when it was hit by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, SARS, and today's slower growing and far more vulnerable economy.

Based on daily tracking of energy usage and transportation activity, in conjunction with a record plunge of purchasing managers' sentiment in both manufacturing and services just reported for February, there is good reason to believe that the Chinese economy, the world's largest economy by purchasing power parity, is contracting during the current quarter, possibly quite sharply. Not only does that imply its annual growth target of around 6 percent is in tatters, but it suggests an increasingly China-centric global economy is now in recession.

Slowdown: Slowing global growth adds to the challenges of central banks in responding to a new disease

Slowdown: Slowing global growth adds to the challenges of central banks in responding to a new disease

Yes, the US economy looks good by comparison. But real GDP growth of just 2.1 percent in the final period of 2019 hardly qualifies as a boom. The United States also lacks the cushion of resilience required to withstand the global shock now unfolding. As former US Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan stressed long ago, the US economy should never be thought of as “an oasis of prosperity” in an otherwise weak world.

Like investors, policymakers have also been blindsided. This is a supply shock – not a demand shock that can be rectified with monetary stimulus. Yet, despite having little ammunition to deploy, central banks are reopening their timeworn playbook. That might soothe battered financial markets, but will do little to address the physical constraints on real economic activity coming from draconian quarantines, travel restrictions and fears of assembly in public places.

While traditional monetary stimulus is unlikely to temper downside pressures on real activity, it could certainly provide a boost following containment of COVID-19. When that occurs is anyone’s guess. There may be some signs of a peaking of the infection rate at ground zero – China’s Hubei Province – but that is far from the case elsewhere around the world. At the same time, it is important to stress the lags between the disease infection curve and adverse economic impacts stemming from disease containment efforts. The very last thing that China or any other public health authority wants to do is to be lulled into a premature relaxation of disease containment just to restart economic growth engines. That might trigger a relapse that could well intensify the echo effects of this pandemic.

This underscores what could well be the toughest dilemma for globalization – the tradeoff between the quantity and quality of economic growth. The economic case for globalization is both simple and powerful. It rests on the combination of job creation and poverty reduction that support producers in the developing world and the efficiency solutions that lead to lower prices, boosting consumer purchasing power in the developed world. This ultimate win-win maximizes the

quantity dimension of global growth – the faster the rate of expansion, the greater the presumed benefits to producers and consumers alike.

Shocks like COVID-19, however, unmask compromises that have been made on the quality side of the global growth equation. China's healthcare insurance strategy is a case in point, where the government has long focused on maximizing coverage rather than on expanding benefits. At the same time, employment in China's healthcare services industry accounts for just 5 percent of private urban employment versus 13.5 percent in the United States. This leaves China not only ill-equipped to deal with the mounting medical needs of a rapidly aging population, but also without the healthcare infrastructure required to contain an epidemic like the one now at hand.

The good news is that China has been far more transparent about the COVID-19 outbreak than was the case 17 years ago when the government went into denial for several months over SARS. This time, reporting delays were considerably shorter, and Chinese health officials, operating through the China Information System for Disease Control and Prevention, established after SARS, were quick to share the virus genome with the World Health Organization. The bad news is that China's fragmented CDC was designed to track existing diseases rather than identify new outbreaks. Moreover, the apparent origins of COVID-19 – possibly bat hosts infecting wet wild animal markets – are strikingly similar to those that sparked SARS almost two decades ago. With the underbelly of its culture continuing to take precedent over modernization, China has squandered a painful learning experience.

China's healthcare deficiencies, in conjunction with an equally glaring shortfall of unfunded pension liabilities, underscore the chronic gap in its social safety net. In response, households are predisposed toward precautionary saving, which, in turn, constrains growth in private consumption. The outbreak of COVID-19 undoubtedly reinforces this fear of an uncertain future, posing yet another obstacle to the national strategy of consumer-led rebalancing.

All of this points to one of the most uncomfortable truths of globalization. China, as the world's largest producer, enjoyed a competitive edge, in part because it under-invested in its social safety net and avoided building those costs into product prices. The United States, as the world's largest consumer, tilted its economy toward excess consumption, in part because it could expand its

household sector purchasing power by buying cheaper goods made in China and more recently by China-centric global value chains.

This is the devil's compact of globalization – maximizing the speed, or quantity, of economic growth while under-investing in the quality dimension of the growth experience. The same is the case with respect to climate change – an equally glaring deficiency on the quality side of the growth equation stemming from chronic under-investment in environmental protection.

While it is easy to pin the blame on China for avoiding its own safety net imperatives, others are equally guilty. By withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, reversing auto emissions standards, boosting support to coal mining and attempting to cut the budget for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States under the Trump Administration is also opting for the quantity of economic growth over quality. Can the confluence of a pandemic, a financial crash, and an unexpected global recession alter this tradeoff? The fate of globalization hangs in the balance, but so, too, does the human condition.

Source : <https://www.eurasiareview.com/07032020-covid-19-quality-shock-to-globalization-analysis/>

# **New World Order: Not looking Pretty By Dr. James Dorsey**

Television news summarizes daily what a new world order shaped by civilisationalists entails. Writer William Gibson's assertion that "the future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed" is graphically illustrated in pictures of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of desperate Syrians fleeing indiscriminate bombing in Idlib, Syria's last rebel stronghold, with nowhere to go.

It's also evident in video clips from the streets of Indian cities where police stand aside as Hindu nationalists target Muslims and Prime Minister Narendra Modi turns Muslims into second-class citizens; refugee camps in Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled ethnic cleansing in Myanmar linger with no prospect of a better life; a devastating civil war in Libya fuelled by foreign powers propagating a worldview that has much in common with civilisationalism; a take-it-or-leave-it US plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that belittles and disregards Palestinian aspirations; the Trump administration's adoption of rules that favour immigrants from Europe rather than Africa, Asia and Latin America; and China's brutal effort to erase the identity and culture of its Turkic Muslim minority.

The constant tv diet of the horrors of civilizationalist-inspired violence, war, human suffering, discrimination, and prejudice coupled with fears of existential threats posed by the other, migration and globalization, no longer spark outrage.

"The horrors in Idlib are one face of the emerging 'new world disorder,'" said Wall Street Journal columnist Walter Russell Mead.

Underlying civilizationalist discrimination and repression that risks dislocating ever larger minority segments of populations, political violence and mass migration on unmanageable scales is the mainstreaming of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and the demonization of liberal values that propagate basic, human and minority rights and ideologies that seek to synthesize democratic and conservative values steeped in tradition and religion, particularly Islam.

Civilisationalists and right-wing populists, including Messrs. Trump and Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Chinese President Xi Jinping, feed from similar philosophical troughs.

Political scientist Shawn W. Rosenberg argues that the political structures of states that are governed by populists and/or defined by a civilization rather than the Westphalian concept of a nation are built on the notion that people are characterized not by their ties to one another, but by being part of a nation.

Civilisationalists and populists ignore individual differences and emphasize an individual's relationship to the nation. In their world, individuals are at the bottom of the heap in a civilizationalist state that is anchored in concepts of loyalty to the nation and obedience to the state and its leaders who embody the will of the people.

Mr. Rosenberg warns that civilisationalists see an independent judiciary, Western concepts of rule of law, and a free press as institutions that not only obstruct accomplishment of their mission but also undermine their definition of the role and place of the individual.

The civilizationalist approach is making itself felt not only in lands governed by civilisationalists

To protect a nation's integrity, civilisationalists and populists seek to shield 'the people' from foreign influences, migration and the nation's competitors, other nations. They see their nation's power as derived from being stronger than others and doing better than others at the other's expense.

Foreign policy is geared towards that goal rather than towards a global community that upholds principles of equality, equity and cooperation, Mr. Rosenberg asserts. Civilisationalists and populist seek economic and/or military diminution, if not domination of others, which by implication requires a rejection or hollowing out of international institutions.

The civilizationalist approach is making itself felt not only in lands governed by civilisationalists. Mainstream political leaders like French President Emmanuel Macron, widely viewed as a centrist who is attempting to counter civilisationalism and populism, are not immune to aspects of civilisationalism.

Read more: Xi Jinping dismisses any claims of cultural clash with US; calls it “stupid”

Nor is the Dutch parliamentary commission that earlier this month held controversial hearings about “unwanted influencing by unfree countries” that focussed on Gulf support for Dutch Muslim communities and an unnuanced view of political Islam. The commission contemplated following in the footsteps of Austria that has banned foreign funding for Muslim organizations. France is considering a similar ban.

Speaking in the city of Mulhouse earlier this month, Mr. Macron laid out his strategy to combat political Islam represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists who in his words insist that Islamic law supersedes the laws of the French Republic and emphasize “Islamist separatism” and “Islamist supremacy.”

Kuwait and Qatar are funding the construction of an Islamic religious and cultural centre in Mulhouse.

Qatar has backed the Brotherhood in the past and is home to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, widely viewed as a one of the foremost influencers of the Brotherhood, a catch-all for a multitude of aligned Islamist groups that bicker among themselves.

German politicians accused the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party of contributing to that environment. They demanded that the party be placed under surveillance

“In the Republic we cannot accept that we refuse to shake hands with a woman because she is a woman. In the Republic, we cannot accept that someone refuses to be treated or educated by someone because she is a woman. In the Republic, one cannot accept school dropouts for religious or belief reasons. In the Republic, one cannot require certificates of virginity to marry,” Mr. Macron said.

Mr. Macron’s sweeping opposition to political Islam persuaded him to support Libyan rebel leader Khalifa Haftar, who stands accused of human rights violations and has aligned himself with a Saudi-backed strand of Salafism that preaches absolute obedience to the ruler.

Mr. Haftar, who also enjoys support of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, two countries opposed to democracy and any expression of Islam that rejects submission to an autocrat, is seeking to wrench control of the Libyan capital of Tripoli from the United Nations-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA). The GNA is backed by Turkey and includes elements associated with the Brotherhood.

Read more: Ziaulhaq son blames CIA & Gen Beg for death of his father

To be sure, France has had its share of jihadist violence in recent years with deadly attacks on a French satirical newspaper, restaurants, music halls and soccer stadiums and the ramming of a truck into a crowd on the streets of Nice.

Creeping civilisationalism does not, however, by definition characterise the efforts by Europeans like Mr. Macron and others to ensure that minority communities, including Muslims, are full-fledged participants in a society that should afford them equal opportunity and rights and requires them to accommodate dominant mores.

Civilizationalist approaches, nonetheless, contribute to the failure to be agnostic in countering all forms of supremacism and racial, ethnic or religious prejudice and the lumping together of ideologies that reject democratic values with ones that seek accommodation.

It's a failure that creates the environment in which someone like white supremacist Tobias Rathjen was emboldened to earlier this month kill nine people with an immigrant background in the German city of Hanau.

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice, Mr. Mead the columnist, concluded that it is hard to see from Idlib.

German politicians accused the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party of contributing to that environment. They demanded that the party be placed under surveillance.

Countering civilisationalism is one side of the coin. Avoiding unhelpful generalisations and oversimplifications is another.

In an examination of the concept of popular sovereignty in Islamic thought, political scientist Andrew F. March argues that this decade's popular Arab revolts marked an "intellectual revolution" and "a comprehensive reformulation of Islamic political philosophy" involving not only "reducing rulers to their proper status as agents of the people but also implicitly raising the people to the ultimate arbiters of God's law."

No doubt, it's a revolution that is rejected by ultra-conservative Muslims, elements of the Brotherhood and various strands of Salafism. Nonetheless, it was a revolution articulated in February 2011, days after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, by none other than Mr. Al-Qaradawi, one of the most prominent Islamist thinkers.

Read more: Opinion: Losing Madinah: Fears Amid Increasing Engagements b/w Saudi Arabia and Israel

Quoting Martin Luther King Jr's prediction that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice," Mr. Mead the columnist, concluded that it "is hard to see from Idlib."

He could have just as well been speaking about the dislocation and suffering in a civilizationalist-dominated world that plays out on television screens across the globe in which rights, equitable rule of law and international law are relegated to the dust bin.

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The politics of pandemics – The Economist

o see what is to come look to Lombardy, the affluent Italian region at the heart of the covid-19 outbreak in Europe. Its hospitals provide world-class health care.

Until last week they thought they would cope with the disease—then waves of people began turning up with pneumonia. Having run out of ventilators and oxygen, exhausted staff at some hospitals are being forced to leave untreated patients to die.

The pandemic, as the World Health Organisation (who) officially declared it this week, is spreading fast, with almost 45,000 cases and nearly 1,500 deaths in 112 countries outside China. Epidemiologists reckon Italy is one or two weeks ahead of places like Spain, France, America and Britain. Less-connected countries, such as Egypt and India, are further behind, but not much. Few of today's political leaders have ever faced anything like a

pandemic and its economic fallout—though some are evoking the financial crisis of 2007-09 (see next leader). As they belatedly realise that health systems will buckle and deaths mount, leaders are at last coming to terms with the fact that they will have to weather the storm. Three factors will determine how they cope: their attitude to uncertainty; the structure and competence of their health systems; and, above all, whether they are trusted.

The uncertainty has many sources. One is that sars-cov-2 and the disease it causes, covid-19, are not fully understood (see Briefing). Another is over the status of the pandemic. In each region or country it tends to proliferate rapidly undetected. By the time testing detects cases in one place it will be spreading in many others, as it was in Italy, Iran and South Korea. By the time governments shut schools and ban crowds they may be too late. China's solution, endorsed by the who, was to impose a brutal quarantine, bolstered by mass-testing and contact tracing. That came at a high human and economic cost, but new infections have dwindled. This week, in a victory lap, President Xi Jinping visited Wuhan, where the pandemic first emerged (see China section). Yet uncertainty persists even in China, because nobody knows if a second wave of infections will rise up as the quarantine eases.

In democracies leaders have to judge if people will tolerate China's harsh regime of isolation and surveillance. Italy's lockdown is largely self-policed and does not heavily infringe people's rights. But if it proves leakier than China's, it may be almost as expensive and a lot less effective (see International section). Efficacy also depends on the structure and competence of health-care systems. There is immense scope for mixed messages and inconsistent instructions about testing

and when to stay isolated at home. Every health system will be overwhelmed. Places where people receive very little health care, including refugee camps and slums, will be the most vulnerable. But even the best-resourced hospitals in rich countries will struggle. Universal systems like Britain's National Health Service should find it easier to mobilise resources and adapt rules and practices than fragmented, private ones that have to worry about who pays whom and who is liable for what (see Britain section).

The United States, despite its wealth and the excellence of its medical science, faces hurdles. Its private system is optimised for fee-paying treatments. America's 28m uninsured people, 11m illegal immigrants and an unknown number without sick pay all have reasons to avoid testing or isolation. Red tape and cuts have fatally delayed adequate testing (see United States section). Uncertainty will be a drag on the third factor—trust. Trust gives leaders licence to take difficult decisions about quarantines and social-distancing, including school closures. In Iran the government, which has long been unpopular, is widely suspected of covering up deaths and cases. That is one reason rebellious clerics could refuse to shut shrines, even though they spread infection (see Middle East & Africa section).

Nothing stokes rumour and fear more than the suspicion that politicians are hiding the truth. When they downplay the threat in a misguided attempt to avoid panic, they end up sowing confusion and costing lives. Yet leaders have struggled to come to terms with the pandemic and how to talk about it. President Donald Trump, in particular, has veered from unfounded optimism to attacking his foes. This week he announced a 30-day ban on most travel from Europe that will do little to slow a disease which is already circulating in America. As people witness the death of friends and relatives, he will find that the pandemic cannot be palmed off as a conspiracy by foreigners, Democrats and cnn. What should politicians do? Each country must strike its own balance between the benefits of tracking the disease and the invasion of privacy, but South Korea and China show the power of big data and mass-testing as a way of identifying cases and limiting their spread. Governments also need to anticipate the pandemic, because actions to slow its spread, such as banning crowds, are more effective if they are early.

The best example of how to respond is Singapore, which has had many fewer cases than expected. Thanks to an efficient bureaucracy in a single small

territory, world-class universal health care and the well-learned lesson of sars, an epidemic of a related virus in 2003, Singapore acted early. It has been able to make difficult trade-offs with public consent because its message has been consistent, science-based and trusted. In the West covid-19 is a challenge to the generation of politicians who have taken power since the financial crisis. Many of them decry globalisation and experts. They thrive on division and conflict. In some ways the pandemic will play to their agenda. Countries may follow America and turn inward and close their borders. In so far as shortages crimp the world economy, industries may pull back from globalisation—though they would gain more protection by diversifying their supply chains. Yet the pandemic also puts doctors, scientists and policy experts once again at the heart of government. Pandemics are quintessentially global affairs. Countries need to work together on treatment protocols, therapeutics and, it is hoped, a vaccine. Worried voters may well have less of an appetite for the theatrical wrestling match of partisan politics. They need their governments to deal with the real problems they are facing—which is what politics should have been about all along.

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# **The Great Oil War of 2020 Has Begun. Can Russia Win By**

## **Nikolas K. Gvosdev**

After the latest round of U.S. sanctions against Russia was signed into law last year, Russian president Vladimir Putin warned that Russia would retaliate at a time and place of its own choosing. Wrecking the OPEC-Plus arrangement and provoking a demolition-derby price war with Saudi Arabia may seem to be an odd and puzzling way to respond, but there may be a method to that madness. I believe that the Kremlin is gambling that, by year's end, it will be able to not only push back against the United States but also to reconstruct its partnership with Saudi Arabia.

One of the major flaws of U.S. politicians is their bad habit of loudly proclaiming their strategies months or even years in advance, giving their adversaries plenty of time to prepare. Over the past two years, members of Congress have made it absolutely clear that Russia's Ukraine bypass pipeline projects—Turkish Stream and Nordstream-2—were in their crosshairs. Moscow attempted to accelerate the completion of these projects before a slow-moving U.S. legislative process could finalize another round of punitive sanctions. Turkish Stream was completed just in time and is already sending Russian energy to Turkey and Southern Europe. Meanwhile, Nordstream-2 would have made it if it hadn't been for those pesky Danes and their environmental protection processes, which held up work on Nordstream just long enough for an eleventh-hour U.S. sanctions push. Even with that assistance—and thanks to a spat with Denmark over a possible sale of Greenland—Moscow had so much advanced warning that it asked its European contractors to focus on the most technically challenging parts of the line first. Gazprom possesses the technical capacity to finish the line—way behind schedule, to be sure—but Nordstream is likely to be completed by the end of 2020. Yes, the delay was sufficient enough to compel Russia to continue to use Ukraine for some export transit, but Moscow's position in the European energy markets remains largely intact.

So the backup U.S. plan has been to encourage Europeans, while Nordstream remains unfinished, to buy more energy produced from North American sources. Indeed, an important part of U.S. strategy in a new era of great-power

competition is to compete with Russia for energy markets and to diminish the resources Moscow can accrue as an energy exporter.

Initially, the U.S. strategy during the second term of the Obama administration was to encourage Saudi Arabia to repeat its performance during the 1980s by using its ability to turn on the taps and drive prices downward so as to cripple the Russian producers and force Moscow to pull back from its efforts in Ukraine and Syria. Despite Saudi Arabia lowering energy production costs, Riyadh could not sustain a long-term price war due to the massive demands on the Saudi budget. Saudi Arabia dramatically shifted away from competing with Russia and towards a new strategy of coordination with Russia. Riyadh and Moscow eventually became the co-axes of the OPEC-Plus arrangement, which was designed to stabilize global energy markets and set a definitive “floor” for energy prices. In return for its cooperation, Moscow expected Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to direct financial flows that were blocked by U.S and EU sanctions into the Russian economy. (Qatar’s purchase of a minority stake in the Russian state-owned Rosneft firm was one example of this approach.)

Yet the weakness of this approach was the wild card nature of the U.S. energy sector. American producers were poised to benefit from higher prices and to fill the gaps when Russia and Saudi Arabia cut their production. When the United States declined to take part in the OPEC-Plus arrangement, Russia’s continued participation would remain contingent largely on whether Saudi Arabia continued to incentivize Moscow’s compliance.

We have seen over the past several months a new hardening in the Kremlin’s policies—where Russia is willing to risk escalation in order to gain advantage or discredit the United States. The world has watched this pattern unfold in Syria vis-a-vis Turkey over the past several weeks. The Russians pushed through some of Ankara’s red lines and then let Turkey see to what extent it could or could not rely on the United States and its European allies—and then President Recep Erdogan traveled to Moscow to re-open negotiations with Vladimir Putin. Russian energy producers have felt that they were on the losing side of the Moscow/Riyadh access. They have been vociferously arguing for a year that Russia should exit the deal. The coronavirus panic provided them with an opportunity to argue that further OPEC-Plus cuts would do nothing to prevent a collapse of energy prices—and that Russia would continue to lose market share. The Saudi response has been to match and call Russia’s bluff by promising to

produce more at even lower prices. But the Russians still have several advantages: the Russian budget can meet its targets with far lower prices than Saudi Arabia's budget will allow; Russia can increase its pipeline exports while a Saudi Arabia increase would take longer to get to markets by seaborne tankers; and, most importantly, the places where the Saudis want to compete with Russia for market share—the European market—will crowd out more expensively produced American exports.

Russia seems willing to engage in a major stress test of the U.S. energy export approach to a prolonged price war. Given that the Trump administration is unlikely to purchase large amounts of U.S. production at a guaranteed high price for the strategic reserve, U.S. producers will face the prospect of much lower revenue—and reach a point where it no longer makes business sense to stay in operation. While some projects are likely to be absorbed by the energy majors, whose economies of scale can make some projects cost-effective, overall U.S. production may decline. And if Joe Biden takes up residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in January 2021, then Americans could expect to see many of the Obama-era environmental and land-use regulations back in full force—further striking both at production as well as building more export infrastructure.

Would the Saudis then be more inclined to return to bargaining with Moscow? Possibly. A good deal depends on how U.S.-Saudi relations fare during a prolonged energy price war. Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who already has his detractors on both sides of the political aisle in Washington, may find it harder to go through with major Saudi purchases of U.S. goods and services in the context of price competition. In turn, he may find that the United States has become far less willing to extend blank security checks to the Saudis. Moreover, if Russia loses its incentive to act as a restraining force on Iran, then the United States has shown limits to the extent it is willing to take on Tehran for Riyadh's benefit. Another Persian Gulf crisis would not only increase energy prices but reinforce Russia's pitch that its Northern Route is a far safer energy export bet.

So Russia enters this oil price war with two overarching objectives: drive U.S. producers out of business, and expose Riyadh to the limits of American support. Thanks to a talented team at the country's Finance Ministry, they have the rainy-day funds in place to achieve that goal. Putin has taken a page from the Trump playbook of trade wars: be prepared to take short-term damage if you think your

opponents will be forced to concede. Perhaps these will assumptions hold up in the weeks and months to come.

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