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Can Labour rebuild its red wall without losing its cities?

Since Labour's disorienting election defeat nine months ago, one political concept has dominated the discussion about how the party might find its way back to power. The "red wall", a term coined by a Conservative pollster, James Kanagasooriam, a few months before the election, has been identified as the part of Britain central to Labour's problems and prospects. Fail to recapture it from the Tories, the argument goes, and face being in opposition for ever.

It's quite a significance to place on an uneven, broken line of constituencies across north Wales, the Midlands and northern England. Precise definitions of the red wall vary, and it includes seats still held by Labour. But the three dozen that fell here to the Tories last year add up to about 6% of Britain's MPs. Even when the red wall was a Labour stronghold, more Labour MPs represented other places. But now that much of the red wall has switched sides, its voters have effectively become swing voters – the category most privileged by our electoral system. Like the southern skilled working class wooed by Margaret Thatcher, and the suburban Middle England prized by Tony Blair, the red wall has become a fascination for political scientists and party strategists.

Books have begun to appear about its changing demographics and priorities, such as The Fall of the Red Wall by Steve Rayson, and Beyond The Red Wall by Deborah Mattinson. If you're on the left, they make difficult reading.
Mattinson has long conducted voter research for Labour. Her interviewees, all former Labour voters who chose the Tories in 2019, often admire Donald Trump, sometimes wish Britain still had an empire, and believe that Boris Johnson and Brexit will "make Britain great again". They hate "scroungers", political correctness and urban liberals, especially if they're from London.

Over recent decades, Rayson concludes, the red wall has become increasingly "similar to many Conservative seats in the south … culturally conservative, older, and disproportionately white … Rather than looking at why [these] voters left Labour in 2019, one could ask, 'Why did these voters stick with Labour for so long?'"

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Both authors rightly see longterm economic decline and a sense that central government is remote and unsympathetic as big contributors to this political mood. But few of the interviewees blame these problems on the Conservatives, despite the immense damage done to the red wall's former industrial towns and mining villages by Thatcherism and then austerity. Instead, they rage against Labour: as somehow both "weak" and "arrogant", too "old-fashioned" and too trendily modern, too "middle-class" and too concerned with poverty. Even allowing for the tendency of voters who've dumped a party to talk up its supposed faults, this disenchantment seems deep. "Those we spoke to were not expecting to return to Labour any time soon," writes Mattinson. "Instead, they were waiting for Labour 'to completely reinvent themselves'."

That's a tall order for any party – especially during a pandemic, while it's also trying to hold a manic government to account. But the sheer distance between the views of these voters and those of many Labour supporters in the rest of the country raises another issue. The party has always attracted people with different beliefs, from centrists to socialists. It has often lost sections of its support and then won them back. But the red wall's alienation feels different: more complete, more thoroughly antagonistic towards the left and centre-left. Winning back many of these voters may be impossible – and could even do Labour more harm than good.

Ever since the slide in its red wall vote began, in the early 00s, a whole range of party figures have tried, and usually failed, to reverse it. The Blair government used new regional development agencies to encourage investment in the north, and filled its cabinet with ministers from the region. In the early 2010s, the pressure group Blue Labour tried to make the party more respectful of the red wall's rooted communities and conservative social values. Then Jeremy Corbyn promised to revive its manufacturing base with a "green industrial revolution". Labour's red wall vote rose sharply in 2017, but collapsed two years later.

Now Keir Starmer seems preoccupied by the red wall too. One of his first acts as leader was to hire an authority on it, Claire Ainsley, as his head of policy. In her 2018 book The New Working Class, she argued that policymaking should be more "led" by public attitudes, including those of working-class people who are "older, living in small towns and suburbia, who value security and nostalgia".

The cautious Starmer has yet to set out his policies, but in his carefully rationed public statements he has emphasised his patriotism, and his respect for the armed forces – both essential political attributes to many red wall voters. Yet as

Mattinson's research and recent political history make clear, it's going to be very hard for Labour to outbid the Conservatives as the party of flag-waving and traditional values. And as a southerner, a London MP and a former human rights lawyer, Starmer might face quite a challenge in reinventing himself as the champion of people who dislike all these.

Moreover, if Labour tries too hard to appeal to the red wall, it risks alienating many of the supporters it still has elsewhere. The modest recovery in the Labour vote since it lost power – even in last year's rout, Labour under Corbyn got almost 1.7m more votes than under Gordon Brown in 2010 – has mostly been in urban Britain, among social liberals and the young.

Just as the red wall once was, the red cities are now taken for granted. It's widely assumed that they'll always vote Labour, almost regardless of what the party stands for. But that's wrong: in 1983, London elected barely half as many Labour MPs as it does now. If Starmer makes too many speeches about patriotism and not enough about the problems with capitalism, many Labour supporters may drift off to the Green party, stop voting altogether, or return to the protest politics that some of them practised in the 90s and 00s.

Yet there are still a few ways that Labour could bring its radical and red wall voters together – which it will need to, to win power. For all their differences, both groups still share some common ground. They want more cheap housing, properly funded public services and a fairer economy. Rather than striking reactionary poses, Starmer needs to remind red wall voters that only a Labour government could conceivably deliver any of those – and that the Conservatives represent interests opposed to such change.

And if that argument fails, there may still be one more option. In Mattinson's otherwise thorough book, as in most media coverage of the red wall, all the interviewees are in their late 30s or older. Young voters – potentially crucial in what are now mostly Tory marginals – are absent. What might win their vote? Labour needs to find out.

By: Andy Beckett
Source: The Guardian

The writer is a Guardian columnist

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Traders are getting smarter about the vaccine race

Investors watching the COVID-19 vaccine development process could be forgiven for thinking it's not so hard. The effort has moved extraordinarily quickly so far, and with few hiccups.

That isn't how things usually go, especially for new diseases. The world got a reminder Tuesday as AstraZeneca Plc paused the trial of its leading candidate, developed with Oxford University, to investigate a single volunteer's illness. It's easy to panic; a setback like this could mean big trouble for AstraZeneca's efforts, and it raises worries about whether any vaccine will ultimately succeed, or if one does, how long the process will take. That's the wrong reaction. This pause shows the system is working as it should. The possibility of setbacks is why the world is testing many candidates in many people.

With every bit of vaccine news, the mantra is 'don't panic, but do proceed with caution.' It applies to investors, drug companies, and regulators deciding which vaccine to approve and when. And while the market has been known to go to extremes on virus developments involving treatments and vaccines, this time its reaction seemed about right: AstraZeneca shares slipped, but didn't crater on the news. That was before the Financial Times reported that trials for AstraZeneca's vaccine may resume next week, which actually prompted a rebound in the stock.

It's not clear how big a deal this particular pause is. Trial halts aren't uncommon or a sure sign of a significant problem. Health care news publication Stat reported Wednesday that the participant received the vaccine and not a placebo, but it's possible that the volunteer's illness — reported to be a spine condition called transverse myelitis — is unrelated to the shot. They may have already had the condition, or this could simply prove to be a singular outlier. The range of possible outcomes includes everything from a quick restart to a longer delay that could create concern about vaccines that use similar technology, including an effort from Johnson & Johnson and Russia's already approved shot. With just one event, the former seems more likely than the latter, especially given the latest news from the FT on the trial's possible quick resumption.

The pause may slow enrollment in AstraZeneca's trial if it restarts, and may affect other efforts. It may also incline companies and regulators to wait for a bit more safety data before approval. That's not such a bad thing if it builds confidence in

the eventual result. Still, halting to track down an answer is the responsible move for volunteers, the company, and the vaccine race.

It's clear that the world must proceed carefully in developing shots intended for millions. While approved vaccines are very safe and companies working on COVID-19 candidates have reported few red flags in small early tests, the human immune system is complicated and unusual reactions do occur. Only large-scale trials on a diverse population can determine whether a particular shot is safe for general use and differentiate outliers from deal-breakers. Big tests are especially crucial in a pandemic scenario with less time for early research.

Because of the sheer number of people in trials — already above 50,000 with many more to come as candidates move forward — there will be more safety scares. Some will prove to be random; others will be of genuine concern.

That's no tragedy, even if it may feel that way to investors who underestimate vaccine development risks or take the wrong side. The real tragedy would be failing to run large tests long enough and only finding out about serious safety issues once vaccines are widely available, destroying already tenuous confidence. Another would be putting too many eggs in one basket, leaving countries without recourse if a particular effort fails.

At least so far, most of the world is working to avoid both outcomes. If companies and regulators can deflect political pressure to be hasty, planned and ongoing trials should give a pretty robust answer on vaccine safety. Just this week, nine major vaccine developers — including AstraZeneca and Pfizer — pledged not to submit their candidates for U.S. approval until they demonstrate safety and efficacy in a large, late-stage trial, allaying concerns that the Trump administration's eagerness for a vaccine could undermine the process. Elsewhere, countries have signed contracts for multiple vaccines that aim to protect against COVID in different ways. The European Union, for instance, is one of AstraZeneca's biggest customers, but on Wednesday it also announced a deal for 200 million doses of a vaccine being developed by rival Pfizer Inc.

There are outliers. Russia is all-in on a vaccine approved with limited data that some scientists question. China is using a vaccine on its military without the benefit of robust testing.

It should be apparent which approach is right, even if the wait is painful.

By: Max Nisen

Source: The Japan Times

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A Grand Strategy of Resilience

Every so often in the history of the United States, there are moments of political realignment—times when the consensus that defined an era collapses and a new paradigm emerges. The liberal era ushered in by President Franklin Roosevelt defined U.S. politics for a generation. So did the neoliberal wave that followed in the 1980s. Today, that era, too, is coming to a close, its demise hastened by the election of President Donald Trump and the chaos of the coronavirus pandemic.

The coming era will be one of health crises, climate shocks, cyberattacks, and geoeconomic competition among great powers. What unites those seemingly disparate threats is that each is not so much a battle to be won as a challenge to be weathered. This year, a pandemic is forcing hundreds of millions of Americans to stay at home. Next year, it might be a 1,000-year drought that devastates agriculture and food production. The year after that, a cyberattack could take out the power grid or cut off critical supply chains. If the current pandemic is any indication, the United States is woefully underprepared for handling such disruptions. What it needs is an economy, a society, and a democracy that can prevent these challenges when possible and endure, bounce back, and adapt when necessary—and do so without suffering thousands of deaths and seeing millions unemployed. What the United States needs is a grand strategy of resilience.

For psychologists who research child development, resilience is what enables some children to endure traumatic events and emerge stronger and better able to navigate future stresses. For ecologists, resilience is an ecosystem's ability to resist, recover, and adapt to fires, floods, or invasive species. For emergency, disaster relief, and homeland security experts, a resilient system is flexible, adaptable, and can withstand an impact. The writer Maria Konnikova has summed up the concept with a single question: "Do you succumb or do you surmount?"

The highest goal for American policymakers should be to preserve and defend the country's constitutional democracy while enabling Americans to thrive regardless of their race, gender, location, or origin. A society that achieves that goal will be better prepared to face the next crisis. A more equal and more just nation is a more resilient one.

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Although Americans tend to think of grand strategy as an overarching foreign policy vision, any true grand strategy requires a solid domestic foundation. The United States' Cold War policy of containment, for instance, had a domestic analog, although it is less emphasized in the foreign policy community. For a generation after World War II, Democrats and Republicans alike embraced a model of regulated capitalism, with high taxes, financial regulations, strong unions, and social safety net programs, and thus charted a path between the totalitarian control of the Soviet Union and the laissez-faire approach that had plunged the United States into the Great Depression. Regulated capitalism and containment together were the grand strategy that defined the post–World War II era. A grand strategy of resilience, likewise, will not meet with success unless the United States addresses the many forms of inequality, fragility, and weakness that undermine the country's preparedness from within.

AGE OF CRISES

"Grand strategy" is a slippery term, with perhaps as many definitions as authors who invoke it. It can describe a framework that guides and focuses leaders and societies on their aims and priorities. Critics of the notion believe this is impossible: no paradigm, they say, can help navigate a chaotic, uncertain future, and in any case, U.S. society is too polarized to identify a consensus paradigm today. But the skeptics have it backward. Grand strategy is won, not found. It emerges from argument and debate. And it is useful precisely because it offers guidance in a complex world.

Start with pandemics. For hundreds of years, quarantines have been essential to preventing the spread of infectious diseases. But today's stay-at-home orders have exacted a devastating social, economic, and psychological toll on individuals and communities. Small businesses that are closed may never reopen. Tens of millions of people are out of work. Families are struggling to juggle childcare, homeschooling, and working from home. The government's goal should be to minimize those disruptions—to build a system that can prevent economic disaster, secure supply chains for essential materials, and massively scale up production and testing when needed.

The United States needs a democracy, an economy, and a society that can endure, bounce back, and adapt.

Climate change could pose an even bigger threat. A sustained drought, akin to the one that created the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression, could threaten the global food supply. Rising sea levels, especially when coupled with storms, could flood low-lying cities. Fires already disrupt life in California every year. Climate-induced crises will also lead to population migrations globally and, with them, social unrest and violence. Part of the answer is aggressive action to limit increases in temperature. But in addition, the United States must be able to endure climate shocks when they arise.

Consider also the country's dependence on technology and the vulnerabilities it entails. Cyberattacks have already targeted U.S. election systems, banks, the Pentagon, and even local governments. The city of Riviera Beach, Florida, was forced to pay a ransom to cybercriminals who had taken over its computer systems; big cities, such as Atlanta and Baltimore, have faced similar attacks. Cyberattacks on the U.S. power grid, akin to the one that led to blackouts in Ukraine in December 2015, could "deny large regions of the country access to bulk system power for weeks or even months," according to the National Academy of Sciences.

All these challenges will play out at a time of growing rivalry—and especially geoeconomic competition—among great powers. Over the last half century, the United States has been the world's most powerful economy and has thus been relatively safe from outside economic pressures. But as China's economic strength grows, that is likely to change. The United States and other democracies have become dependent on China for essential and nonessential goods. China's ability to exploit that dependence in a future crisis or conflict should be extremely worrisome. A strategy based on resilience would help deter such coercion and minimize the disruption if it does occur.

THE HOME FRONT

One foundational weakness is that American democracy is beset by broken processes and vulnerable to outside meddling. Four years after Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election, the United States has yet to take serious steps to protect its voting systems from hostile foreign governments and cybercriminals. Comprehensive reforms would include voter-verified paper ballots and the auditing of voting results. A new agency charged with election security could develop standards and conduct mandatory training for election officials, as

Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, has proposed. And as the pandemic has made clear, voting should not require a trip to the ballot box on Election Day. Nationwide vote-by-mail and early voting policies would provide resilience during a crisis—and make voting easier and safer in ordinary times, too.

Democracy is not resilient if people do not believe in it. Yet Americans' trust in the government has been stuck near historic lows for years, and surveys show that startling numbers of citizens do not think democracy is important. It is no accident that this loss of faith has coincided with decades of widening economic inequality and a rising consensus that the government is corrupt. Study after study has shown that the U.S. government is far more responsive to the wealthy and big corporations than to ordinary citizens. Only sweeping changes to the rules regulating lobbying, government ethics, corruption, and revolving-door hiring from the private sector can restore public trust.

Generations of racist policies—redlining, militant policing, and the failure to regulate predatory lending, to name just three examples—have done much to undermine U.S. resilience, too. A country will have trouble bouncing back when entire communities are disproportionately vulnerable in a crisis and when leaders use divide-and-conquer ideas to stir division and prevent solidarity across races. Fighting for justice is the morally right thing to do—and it makes American society stronger.

When it comes to economic policy, an entire generation of American leaders embraced deregulation, privatization, liberalization, and austerity. The result has been staggering inequality, stagnant wages, rising debt loads, an intolerable racial wealth gap, shrinking opportunity, and rising anxiety. Low wages, limited social benefits, and an unaffordable and inefficient health insurance system have weakened the country's resilience by turning any economic shock into a potentially existential threat for many citizens. "Deaths of despair," such as suicides and overdoses, plague rural areas. Meanwhile, the wealthy and powerful continue to push for and win lower tax rates, which increase their wealth and power and create artificial political pressure to oppose social infrastructure spending. The damage to American resilience, in ordinary times and especially in a crisis such as the current one, has been considerable, as has the resulting loss of economic opportunity and innovation that could boost the United States' power.

Resilience demands reversing these trends: expanding health care and childcare to all Americans, restructuring the economy so that people gain higher wages, restoring the power of unions, making early education universal, and ensuring that students can graduate from college debt free. All these goals are eminently achievable.

Officials must also provide the basic infrastructure necessary to operate in the modern world. The United States has a long tradition of public investment in infrastructure—from the post office to rural electrification to the national highway system. In recent decades, however, that legacy has been abandoned. The pandemic has revealed that, whether for telemedicine, remote work, or education, high-speed Internet is an essential utility, just like water and electricity. But nearly a quarter of rural Americans do not have adequate access to it, in part because Internet provision has been left to the marketplace. The country's financial infrastructure also needs to be updated. Millions of unbanked Americans are dependent on check cashers to access their hard-earned dollars, which eats into their wages and their time. Both in normal times and during a crisis, the Federal Reserve's policies are less effective than they could be and favor financial institutions because the Fed uses banks as intermediaries rather than interfacing directly with consumers. If every person or business instead had access to a no-fee, no-frills account at the Federal Reserve, it could reduce the unbanked population and ensure that everyone could get stimulus payments instantaneously in a crisis.

MARKET FAILURES

Decades of neoliberal capitalism have not made markets more resilient, either. Competition is suffering, and fewer companies are being founded, as monopolists and megacorporations come to dominate one sector after another. The "shareholder primacy" philosophy and growing pressure from financialization have turned some corporate leaders into short-term tacticians who use buybacks, leverage, tax strategies, and lobbying to increase their stock prices, even if doing so means greater fragility, volatility, and boom-and-bust economic cycles that lead to big taxpayer bailouts. As some sectors come to depend on just a few firms, prices rise, innovation suffers, and supply chains become fragile. Meanwhile, some companies amass so much power that they distort the democratic process by throwing their weight around in Washington.

Combating these trends will require reforms designed to deconcentrate wealth and power: robust financial regulations (including a new Glass-Steagall Act, to separate investment banking from retail banking), a more progressive tax structure, stronger unions, and aggressive antitrust enforcement to prevent anticompetitive mergers and to divorce platforms from the commercial activity that traffics across them. Such reforms, especially when applied to the financial, telecommunications, and technology sectors, would discourage business models that increase systemic risk and make individual companies “too big to fail.” These reforms would also make it harder for wealthy individuals and well-funded special interest groups to capture the government.

For decades, economic-policy makers also failed to think seriously about a deliberate, national-level industrial policy, deeming it impermissible even as they allowed it in the form of a host of sector-specific tax benefits and regulatory policies. A coherent industrial strategy would enable leadership and innovation in areas critical to the challenges of the future, including clean energy and technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics. It would also decrease the risk of supply chain disruptions, which can lead to public health and economic disasters, as the shortages of ventilators and personal protective equipment during the pandemic have shown.

The failure to pursue sound industrial policy points to a broader oversight. Whether the next crisis is another pandemic, a cyberattack, a climate shock, or a geoeconomic conflict, the United States lacks a comprehensive strategy to ensure its economic resilience. The government does not even have an office equipped to develop such a plan. Yet there is so much planning and coordinating to do: research and development keeps the country on the cutting edge of the technology needed to prevent and respond to threats. Supply chain analysis and planning ensures that critical materials can be produced even after a systemic shock. Production and mobilization planning ensures that supplies can be delivered quickly and exported to help countries in need. This is difficult, detailed, and technical work, and it must be ongoing because markets are constantly evolving. A new U.S. Department of Economic Resilience, consolidating resources currently spread across many agencies, could lead the charge and draw up a comprehensive road map, akin to the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. In it, the government could set goals for R & D, identify supply chain threats, coordinate its response to trade-induced inequality, develop a plan for competitiveness in artificial intelligence and other frontier sectors, and lay out

a range of industrial policy programs, from small-business lending to export incentives. The full array of ills that beset U.S. economic resilience is on display in the defense sector. Debates over U.S. military spending attract considerable attention but often overlook how concentrated the country's defense industrial base has become. A 2019 government report found that of 183 major weapons systems contracts, two-thirds had been awarded with no competition and half had gone to just five firms. In such a top-heavy sector, small businesses and entrepreneurs have a hard time breaking in—many, according to news reports, have simply given up. The Pentagon is left to partner with the same companies over and over, even those that charge excessive prices or, worse still, have previously been accused of fraud. All of this adds up to lower quality, higher costs, and less innovation. The United States' ability to endure and bounce back is strengthened when it has innovative, competitive markets that can anticipate a crisis or adapt when one takes place—and weakened when it does not.

Offshoring, too, has made the U.S. military less resilient. A recent report from the Department of Defense revealed that the United States no longer has the capacity to produce many of the essential materials used for military hardware or the technical know-how to scale up domestic production in the event of a major crisis. "China is the single or sole supplier for a number of specialty chemicals used in munitions and missiles," the report notes. When it comes to one critical material, carbon fibers, "a sudden and catastrophic loss of supply would disrupt [Department of Defense] missile, satellite, space launch, and other defense manufacturing programs. In many cases, there are no substitutes readily available."

A COLLECTIVE PROJECT

To build a foundation of domestic strength is not to withdraw from the world—far from it. Most countries, including the United States, cannot be completely resilient on their own. Not all critical supplies and manufacturing capacities will be available domestically, and not all countries will have enough economic power to withstand political and economic pressure from great-power competitors. The solution is to deepen the ties and alliances that bind the like-minded liberal democracies of North America, western Europe, and Northeast Asia. A single country might not control the entire supply chains needed to respond to a public health emergency, for instance, but an alliance likely could. An alliance composed of resilient liberal democracies would also have the collective countervailing

power to deter geoeconomic threats or cyberattacks from great-power competitors such as China and Russia. Critically, the purpose of such collective resilience is not to expand and engulf the world; it is to preserve the states within the alliance.

When it comes to economic issues, collective resilience will require a major change in outlook. The recent history of international economic policy is one of trade liberalization, often in ways that have benefited capital and with little regard for the regime types of the countries involved or the potential ramifications for domestic resilience. To continue down this path is risky. International trade policies that increase inequality and weaken domestic production capacity make the United States less resilient and more susceptible to geoeconomic threats and leverage. Liberal democracies' agenda for international cooperation should focus on strengthening their own social infrastructure and making markets resilient, not on marginal gains in efficiency that come at the expense of domestic resilience.

Decades of neoliberal capitalism have not made markets more resilient.

Even as the United States deepens its relationships with close allies, resilience will require attending to the rest of the world, as well. Diseases travel with ease, so any country far or near that cannot get a handle on an epidemic poses a danger to the United States and the world. Famines and other climate shocks might lead to massive refugee flows or set off violence that spills over into peaceful areas. Another critical part of U.S. foreign policy should therefore be to advocate, and assist with, a development agenda based on resilience. That means, for example, helping foreign countries build up their public health capacities and foster sturdy and diversified economies. Most developing countries must currently choose between a neoliberal approach that benefits global capital and a Chinese-led path that brings with it a risk of dependence and debt traps. The United States and international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund should aim to provide a new path focused on domestic flexibility and capacity.

More broadly, an international system that depends on a single country to accomplish collective goals is not a resilient one. For decades, some foreign policy experts have celebrated the United States' role as "the indispensable nation." Today, Washington should instead use its influence to ensure that its allies and

partners can accomplish shared goals even when the United States is not involved—call it “resilient multilateralism.” The African Union’s creation, in 2016, of the Africa Centers for Disease Control is a good example of what such institution building can look like.

When it comes to great-power rivals, a U.S. grand strategy of resilience will require healthy working relationships and frequent cooperation. Working together is necessary for managing climate change and pandemics. Economic ties are inevitable and desirable, and the vast majority of goods and services do not require fully independent supply chains. Functional relationships with China and Russia will make open conflict less likely by reducing the risk of misperceptions and misunderstandings. Ultimately, cooperation and communication do not require affection or a shared ideology, nor do they prevent countries from acknowledging their differences or seeking greater economic independence from one another.

A resilient United States needs to retain a powerful, cutting-edge military to deter and defend against threats from abroad. But it would not—and should not—go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. As the last two decades have shown, wars of choice designed to transform foreign societies make the United States less resilient, not more. They cost an enormous amount of money, diverting dollars that could have been spent at home. They redirect the attention of policymakers, who then cannot focus on challenges that arrive without warning, such as pandemics, or arrive gradually, such as climate change. And the dream of turning war-torn countries into Denmark is just that: a dream. Its failure contributes to the loss of faith in U.S. leaders and institutions, in the United States and elsewhere.

Any grand strategy has tradeoffs, and a resilience-based approach is no exception. It would require the United States to abandon democracy promotion by force and deprioritize policies that focus on economic efficiency and benefit global capital. But these are tradeoffs worth making. Even well-intentioned wars can weaken the country and destabilize entire regions, and the era of go-go trade liberalization has contributed to extreme economic inequality.

Washington is at a pivotal moment. Ideas that dominated for decades have been exhausted, and the need for a new approach coincides today with a crisis of massive proportions. The precise challenges ahead are not yet known, but they

are coming, and they are certain to require planning, adaptation, and durability. In this new era, a grand strategy of resilience can act as a North Star for policymakers. It will make the United States stronger, freer, and more equal, and it will preserve, protect, and strengthen democracy for the next generation.

By: Ganesh Sitaraman

Source: Foreign Affairs Magazine

Overcoming the Failure of Utilities Services in Pakistan

With a blink of wind or a thunder of the cloud, the first thing people in Pakistan suffer is outrage of grid leaving most of them out of electricity. Similarly, in winter the pressure in gas pipe lines reduce to a level leaving you no source to cook or keep warm. Tap water in most of the cities is already not drinkable while traffic signals are frequently out of order. Imagine a thunderstorm in cold winter eve and then it is you and your creator only, no support from utilities will be available to you. Strangely in freezing countries of Europe including Turkey one neither has grid outrage nor reduced gas pressure in extreme winters. Similarly, in hottest climates of middle eastern developed countries you have 24-hour presence of utilities services. What could be the reason behind the apathy faced by citizens of Pakistan. There are three major reasons one may look for.

First of all, we are in a very much hurry to implement a certain project, be it provision of electricity, gas, drinking water, treatment of water or waste water and provision of other civic services. In the developed world data collection and appropriate design phase may take up to two years while we wish to have it done in 4-6 months. We google the web, consult text books (written for other countries) and shake older studies and come up with half-cooked designs. In our urge of urgency, we implement half-cooked solutions leading to failures and huge maintenance costs (which we rarely account for) resulting in misery of beneficiaries and wastage of resources.

Let us hope that by a miracle or due to international loaner's presence we somehow managed to get the design right. In this case alas we go for rationalizing the costs. This decision is mostly political or managerial easing the technical requirements and rationalizing in almost all cases would mean reducing the cost. This results in lower quality work of a project again leading to failure once in service.

Thirdly, even if the design is appropriate and finances available are enough, we lack proper monitoring along with wide spread corruption to under-estimate the quality of work. Society is full of examples in which public buildings were completed later than the completion of personal houses of people involved. Another problem is ignoring the importance of standards set in design. Be it proper ditching of pipes, connections, insulation of pipes and wires, all these

issues are given least importance. Major reason is our aptitude as a society to seek temporary solutions i.e. jugaar rather than spending time, resource and applying the right design while doing a certain work. How can we overcome the failure of projects and our utilities sector? The strategy required needs time and resources. First of all, we need to equip our design teams in all sectors with latest appropriate practical knowledge. Turkey and China seem to be great options for our technical experts to actually work on systems for at least 1 year to understand them better. Many Turkish municipalities have developed 'municipal services academies' where theoretical and practical trainings range from weeks to years and are open to all who are interested. The 'union of municipalities" of Turkey is about to finalize its design of 'Municipal Academy' with an investment of USD 1 Billion where practical trainings would be provided for all municipal services. We need to get people trained from such places and also develop our very own such centers. Our experts may enhance their knowledge practically by developing small to medium-scale facilities inside the country.

We all admire the beauty of clean water streams flowing through European cities but back at home we have floating solid waste dumps on the surface of the streams carrying waste water. Prioritization must be done logically, while we are to build waste water treatment plants for cities, they are bound to fail if we don't have secure and reliable waste water collection system. Open channels imply flow can change and also nature of waste water may change at the point of discharge. In the very same way, our electric and phone lines are hanging from pole to pole and a long wooden ladder can be seen following two persons on a bike in the streets to keep the system operational. This is the state of affairs on the ground and we seek state-of-art which in this case seems to be moving wooden ladder! Every treatment plant and similarly a project related to utility service is unique and needs local investigation and measures. This may increase any chance of success. Concerning the finances involved, all projects need to have a full cost recovery mechanism and full cost implies investment cost as well operation and maintenance expenses. In this regard life cycle costing tool should be made mandatory before evaluation of any project. Similarly, unit-cost comparison and assessment should be done before final approval.

Lastly, we should not forget that giving half dose of a medicine to hundred patients is less promising than giving the required full dose to even thirty. We should quit habit of having dozens of not well planned, half-cooked and inefficient

projects in favour of a smaller number of well prepared and efficient projects. This would need capacity building of all stakeholders including decision-makers, implementers and beneficiaries. Beneficiaries inclusion right from the perception of a project idea is quite crucial. People who are going to use a certain utility or service should have a say and choice of prioritization. Public awareness and sense of ownership is also crucial if we seek to have reliable and useful projects and utility services.

By: Azhar Ali

Source: Daily Times

The writer is working as a senior specialist at the Urban Unit Lahore. He has spent more than 20 years in Europe. He has studied and worked in fields of Engineering, Public Health, Ecology, Disaster Management, Change Management and Energy Management. He is especially interested in circular economy and climate change subject

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The Road to Peace In Afghanistan no Longer Runs Through Pakistan

Toward the end of August, a delegation from the Afghan Taliban led by the group's deputy, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, travelled to Islamabad. There, they met with Pakistan's foreign minister and head of its Inter-Services Intelligence, the military's intelligence wing. The first gathering, held at Pakistan's Foreign Office, was meant to give boost to an intra-Afghan negotiation process that has been racked by persistent delays, including over the release of Taliban inmates by Afghan authorities.

Baradar's meetings seem to have been helpful. A Taliban negotiating team is now in Doha, Qatar, and is set to hold its first direct peace talks with representatives of the Afghan government. But in these talks, the Taliban will be led by Mullah Abdul Hakim, a hardline cleric and the Taliban's de facto chief justice, and not Baradar, who was central to the Taliban signing a peace deal with the United States back in February. The change is part of a broader trend of Pakistan losing influence over a conflict it was once seen to script.

For years, Islamabad has maintained an uneasy relationship with Baradar, who, now in his fifties, leads the Taliban office—essentially its political arm—from Doha. Before 2018, Baradar spent eight years in Pakistani custody. His eventual release came at the behest of U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who had been tasked with finding a way to get talks between the Taliban and Washington going. Deft maneuvering by both Islamabad and Washington subsequently paved the way for nine rounds of negotiations, culminating in the earlier February deal this year. That first Doha agreement provided for drawing down approximately 7,000 NATO forces in Afghanistan and the lifting of U.S. sanctions on the Taliban this August. But talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, which were to follow in the summer, have taken longer than expected. The coronavirus—and the public airing of internal political disagreements between Afghanistan's political powerbrokers—have led to worries that Kabul may not have what it takes to strike, let alone sustain, a provisional power-sharing deal with the Taliban.

The absence of a credible guarantor of peace in Afghanistan is a big problem for everyone involved. For its part, the West has long believed that Pakistan could play that role but is not quite fully exercising its power. In turn, the United States frequently tried to ramp up the pressure on its erstwhile partner. A recent controversial attempt was through the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force,

which placed Pakistan on a grey list in 2019 for potential money laundering and terrorist financing. That designation threatens Islamabad's ability to borrow internationally.

But on some indicators, the United States' relationship with Pakistan has also improved. Officials in both countries are more careful about accusing each other of sabotaging regional stability. Pakistan's commitment to regional stabilization and peace notionally underlines its pursuit of East-West connectivity, which could greatly increase Afghanistan's trade and economic prospects. And the United States, for its part, seems to have done a volte-face on its hard-line policy towards the Haqqani Network, a group it long accused Islamabad of harboring, but which Islamabad insisted was dislocated after it officially launched counterterror operations in 2014. Indeed, many Pakistani observers find it ironic that after initially demanding that Pakistan eliminate the Haqqanis, the United States is now taking the lead in encouraging the group's public rehabilitation.

Critically, there is also a growing understanding that Pakistan's leverage over the Taliban is waning, not least of all because of the Taliban's internal dynamics and the group's well-established reputation for political and financial independence. The recent elevation of Mullah Yaqub, the son of former Taliban leader Mullah Omar, to the role of Taliban military chief over several senior commanders, signals the rise of a new generation of leaders that did not experience the historical patronage of the Pakistani state.

That generation, and the Taliban along with it, now looks to Doha more than Islamabad as a guarantor of its interests. It has requested that Taliban inmates released by the Afghan government be sent to Qatar rather than Pakistan. And when intra-Afghan negotiations begin, it is expected that they will cycle through multiple capitals, including Doha, Oslo, and Tashkent, but not Islamabad, despite—or perhaps because of—the Baradar connection.

Indeed, unlike in the past, factors that could upend attempts at negotiating peace have relatively little to do with the extent and limits of Pakistan's influence.

The first of these comes from within Kabul itself, where there is still a lack of unified consensus on what peace with the Taliban would look like. Inside Afghanistan, disgruntlement over the sequencing of the peace process this year—starting with February's bilateral commitments between the United States and

Taliban, which bypassed Kabul entirely—is quite public. A series of high profile but unclaimed deadly attacks in and around Kabul in recent weeks have targeted leaders associated with the U.S.-brokered process. These strikes have amplified concerns that the intra-Afghan talks could be derailed. The impression that there are serious turf wars within President Ashraf Ghani's administration doesn't help. Recently Ghani issued a decree appointing 46 members to the High Council for National Reconciliation. That makes the council roughly twice the size of the negotiating team it is mandated to oversee, bringing into question its viability. Former President Hamid Karzai, whose name was included in the list of appointments, has refused to be a part of the body.A second problem comes from U.S. strategy, now wedded to President Donald Trump's compulsion to secure an exit from Afghanistan for all but 5,000 U.S. troops in time for the presidential election in November. For many in Afghanistan and indeed in the wider region, the extent to which the United States is politically committed to guaranteeing a deal between the Afghan government and the Taliban—through troops or otherwise—remains unclear. According to the Pentagon, the United States has already closed five bases in Afghanistan, and it has largely ended the use of air power, which had been a critical factor in keeping the Taliban at bay. That, combined with Trump's frequent threats to pull all remaining troops from the country and cut aid, could embolden the Taliban.

A third issue comes from the internal structure of the Taliban and the ambiguity of its post-peace settlement ambitions. Although the new Taliban department responsible for holding intra-Afghan talks will have the authority to set agendas, decide strategy, and even sign agreements, its leadership too has oscillated, from Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, erstwhile Taliban chief negotiator, to Hakim. Its distance from the Doha-based Taliban political office led by Baradar, furthermore, raises questions about the extent of Baradar's influence over peace talks, and the possibility that different factions may have different goalposts. At the very least, the inclusion of hardline commanders in the new negotiating team suggests that conciliation isn't going to be easy, and that getting to the Taliban to agree to a gradual reduction in violence may be more practical than an outright ceasefire.

Fourth is the risk of regional spoilers. Washington has long suspected and accused Pakistan of maintaining an unhealthy strategic interest in the Afghan endgame without appreciating Islamabad's concerns of threats to Pakistan emanating from Afghan soil. Observers in Islamabad, meanwhile, are worried about a different kind of spoiler that could potentially disrupt reconciliation in Afghanistan: New

Delhi has historically maintained that the Taliban should not be allowed back into government. Indian officials continue to view ongoing negotiations between the United States and the Taliban as a setback to Indian interests in the region. While India's humanitarian and financial aid to Afghanistan makes it one of the country's biggest aid providers, its attempts to nurture a defense and strategic relationship with Kabul make Pakistan uneasy, adding to concerns that India may be sponsoring the maintenance of militant groups within Afghanistan's eastern provinces as a regional hedge.

Finding a way to end the war in Afghanistan is easier said than done. An eventual start to intra-Afghan talks will certainly be a reason for optimism but talks alone will be unable to guarantee peace, unless all parties recognize and address the structural impediments that continue to bedevil the endgame. And given the above risk factors, it is anything but clear that they will.

By: Fahd Humayun

Source: Foreign Policy Magazine

The writer is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Yale University.

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Indian and Chinese Foreign Ministers Fail to Achieve Breakthrough in Ladakh Crisis

The foreign ministers of India and China met on September 10 in Moscow on the sidelines of the annual Shanghai Cooperation Organization's foreign ministers' meeting. This highly anticipated meeting came in the backdrop of an extremely tense military standoff between the two countries in eastern Ladakh since early May this year. Writing on September 9, I had noted "… it is best not to hold out much hope for the outcome of their meeting."

That was indeed the case. While S. Jaishankar and Wang Yi, after a meeting that lasted for more than two hours, agreed to a five-point agenda to resolve the dispute, a close reading of the joint statement that followed adds very little to the substance of India-China talks over the past few months.

Before the September 10 Moscow meeting, India and China had held several rounds of military talks at various levels, which continue. Jaishankar had spoken to Wang once before about the crisis, after the June 15 clash in the Galwan Valley. Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh also met with his Chinese counterpart General Wei Fenghei in Moscow last week. Finally, in their respective capacities as special representatives in the decades-long negotiations around the India-China boundary dispute, the Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had also spoken to Wang on July 6. (Since last year, Doval enjoys the rank of a Cabinet Minister, like Jaishankar.)

In fact, a close side-by-side reading of the Indian foreign ministry's statement after the July 6 conversation and yesterday's joint statement reveals interesting differences, almost none of it indicating that India is anywhere near to achieving the outcome it seeks – restoration of status quo ante as it existed in April this year in eastern Ladakh. In fact, the joint statement – most likely to have been heavily

negotiated – does not reflect key Indian positions. That said, there are modest positive signals in yesterday's statement.

July 6 MEA Press Release of Conversation between Doval and Wang	September 10 Joint Statement by Jaishankar and Wang	Difference
"frank and in-depth"	"frank and constructive"	
"The two Special Representatives agreed that both sides should take guidance from the consensus of the leaders that maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas was essential for the further development of our bilateral relations and that two sides should not allow differences to become disputes."	"The two Ministers agreed that both sides should take guidance from the series of consensus of the leaders on developing India-China relations, including not allowing differences to become disputes."	Linking of development of bilateral relations to the boundary issue dropped in September 10 statement. This has been a major Chinese demand throughout the crisis.
"…re-affirmed that both sides should strictly respect and observe the line of actual control and should not take any unilateral action to alter the status quo…"	"avoid any action that could escalate matters"	No reference to "status quo" in the September 10 statement. Restoration of status quo in eastern Ladakh remains the key sticking point for India. No reference to the Line of Actual Control either.
"It was also agreed that the two	"The two Ministers agreed that	Stronger language, in September

July 6 MEA Press Release of Conversation between Doval and Wang	September 10 Joint Statement by Jaishankar and Wang	Difference
Special Representatives will continue their conversations to ensure full and enduring restoration of peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas in accordance with the bilateral agreements and protocols."	both sides shall abide by all the existing agreements and protocol on China-India boundary affairs, maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas and avoid any action that could escalate matters."	10 statement: "shall abide by" added to "continue conversations" Interesting change, weakened as far as India is concerned: "ensure full and enduring restoration" changed to "maintain"
"The two Special Representatives agreed that the diplomatic and military officials of the two sides should continue their discussions, including under the framework of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China border affairs (WMCC), and implement the understandings reached in a timely manner to achieve the above outcomes."	"They agreed therefore that the border troops of both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance and ease tensions." "The two sides also agreed to continue to have dialogue and communication through the Special Representative mechanism on the India-China boundary question. They also agreed in this context that the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China border affairs (WMCC), should also continue its meetings."	"Quickly disengage, maintain proper distance, and ease tensions" is new and different from "in a timely manner." It suggests an urgency on both sides.

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July 6 MEA Press Release of Conversation between Doval and Wang	September 10 Joint Statement by Jaishankar and Wang	Difference
	"…as the situation eases, the two sides should expedite work to conclude new Confidence Building Measures to maintain and enhance peace and tranquillity in the border areas."	New, interesting addition in the September 10 statement. Also, on paper, states the obvious: existing Confidence Building measures have failed.

Adding to complications was a Chinese readout of the meeting that appeared late last night (Indian time). The tone of the readout was combative, as it talked about China's "stern position" on the ongoing happenings in eastern Ladakh. It also suggested that India "does not consider the development of India-China relations to be dependent on the settlement of the boundary question," contradicting India's stated position. (Curiously, as I noted above, the joint statement also seems to delink the two.) Indian sources had also circulated their version of what Jaishankar communicated to Wang, including the fact that "maintenance of peace and tranquility on the border areas was essential to the forward development of ties."

Meanwhile, the military situation on the ground remains extremely tense.

By: Abhijnan Rej

Source: The Diplomat

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Drowning today, Drought tomorrow

It is hard to believe when you see images and videos of monsoon floods devastating our country. It is unfortunate that despite an abundance of water in Pakistan during the 1990s, the government's lagging policies have raised the prospect of water scarcity that is threatening national security on one hand and the economy on the other.

The availability and non-availability of water draws sharp boundaries between the haves and have nots. The sense of depravity and injustice sparks a controversy between the people. It is a lugubrious whim that the people of the same nation are disunited over a very basic commodity—water.

Pakistan's first ever National Water Policy was formulated and approved in 2018 by consensus among the provinces. Unfortunately, there was no mention of the multi-purpose Kalabagh dam which would otherwise proffer several benefits. The conflict dynamics of Kalabagh dam basically rely on lack of consensus among provinces. Not too long ago, the need for at least two dams or water storage facilities was stressed upon. The current situation is grim.

Kalabagh dam was proposed as the second dam under the Indus Basin Settlement Plan of 1960. However, at that time it was thought suitable by the officials to construct a dam at Tarbela, and to build Kalabagh dam later. Accordingly, Tarbela dam was completed by the mid-1970s but Kalabagh dam is still nowhere in sight. Over the next decades, this issue was both favoured and opposed by the rulers; both civil and military, every now and then, but the result is yet to be seen.

To date, Punjab is raising demands for the construction of Kalabagh dam as already much time has been lost and our resources are becoming scarce due to the absence of major dams in the country. On the other hand, the other three

provinces are opposed to the idea of constructing Kalabagh dam on political grounds and vested interests. If the shortage of water, somehow or another, convinces people into believing that one particular province is usurping their due share, and their financial losses are due to unfair distribution of water, they will surely revolt. The grievance of the provinces must be addressed lest it transforms into something uglier.

There are many differences on the hotspot that is Kalabagh dam which need to be resolved in an environment of mutual respect and trust. It wouldn't be provident to unilaterally decide the fate of Kalabagh project on behalf of concerned powers. Politicians have forever diverted and misled the nation through scare-mongering, demagogic viewpoint and spinning stories about 'better' alternatives and options to the dam. Many mistakes have been made in the past and we are still facing their consequences. Why add another one to the litany?

For a developing country like Pakistan that lacks precious resources, resilience to natural calamities, and cohesive policies, the distress brought about by increasing water insecurity will further disturb the country's stability and result in conflicts and disagreements.

The gap between the supply and demand of water is likely to widen.

It can be tackled through a systematic and institutionalised approach. National unity is a fragile term which must be taken care of accordingly. It is the government's duty to raise awareness about water conservation and preserve national unity. However, national unity becomes vulnerable when leaders speak on "behalf of the majority" and present alternative facts and disintegrate national integrity.

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The state should reach a consensus on the construction of Kalabagh dam in the spirit of national interest.

By: Zainab Nazir

Source: The Nation

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