

# WORLD TIMES INSTITUTE

## **The Biden Doctrine Exists Already.**

In an essay published earlier this year in *Foreign Affairs*, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden wrote, “The triumph of democracy and liberalism over fascism and autocracy created the free world. But this contest does not just define our past. It will define our future, as well.” That is a sentiment worth pausing over. Biden, who was born in 1942, is a child of that heroic era: He grew up in the 1950s, when the United States assumed its role of benevolent hegemon of the West in the struggle with the Soviet Union. The Soviet collapse in 1989 appeared to put an end to the great ideological contest of the 20th century. In his own tenure as vice president, Biden worked with President Barack Obama to buffer conflict with the authoritarian states of our own time—China, Russia, Iran.

Only four years have passed since that time, and yet in his essay Biden was, in effect, conceding that this project had failed. The contest with authoritarianism will define the American future both because those states, each in their own way, have chosen a path of confrontation with the West, and because—what is far more shocking—in 2016 the United States elected a president who has trampled democratic norms at home, insulted democratic allies abroad, and showered dictators with praise. Should Biden become president, he will inherit a crisis that bears a resemblance to the early days of the Cold War—far better in some ways but worse in others. Indeed, several of Biden’s foreign-policy advisors to whom I have been speaking in recent weeks made the analogy to President Harry S. Truman.

Certain words keep cropping up in Biden’s campaign documents and the works of his confidantes: “free world,” “democracy,” “Europe,” “lead.” Progressives would regard these as retrograde words that bear the mark of a candidate shaped by a vanished world. Certainly they are words that come naturally to Biden, an old-school sentimental patriot. Yet to his former national security aides and current advisors, some of them almost two generations younger than Biden, they constitute the necessary response to radical changes both abroad and at home.

I began every conversation with members of the foreign-policy team by asking how they thought the world had changed. Colin Kahl, Biden's national security advisor from 2014 to the end of the administration and now a professor at Stanford University, said, "The three things that are most obvious are one, the world has become so interconnected that the biggest existential challenges we face are the transnational threats"—an awareness acutely amplified by the coronavirus pandemic; "two, democracy is on its back foot around the world; and three, the changing distribution of global power—great-power competition is back."

These threats are interconnected. As Kahl points out, Obama had muted the language of democracy promotion not only because he recoiled from American braggadocio but because the whole debate, from the time of President Bill Clinton's strategy of "democratic enlargement," had revolved around the question of how, and how far, the United States could project its domestic values abroad. The implicit message of the Iraq War was: much less than we think, and at a vastly greater cost. Nevertheless, the debate itself presupposed American primacy—and American democracy.

Those pillars have crumbled away. "This is not about a liberal effort to expand democracy," Kahl said. "This is about defending the existing frontiers of the free world." Those frontiers are threatened by illiberal populism inside democratic states and abroad by the proxy wars and weaponized corruption of Russia as well as China's growing effort to leverage its economic power to rewrite the rules of the global order. "We have to rally the democratic nations to preserve what we have," Kahl said.

Here lies the analogy to 1947, the year when Truman declared that the United States would come to the aid of nations fighting tyranny because Soviet opportunism threatened U.S. national security. Of course today's Russia is a middling power, and China, though more formidable than any past American rival, poses that which is primarily economic and diplomatic. What's more, in the name of fighting an existential threat, the United States offered succor to right-wing dictators and overthrew democratically elected leaders. That is not the record Biden plans to emulate. But Washington also fostered networks of alliances and rule-based institutions that governed the world without a heavy American hand—

thus the conceit of the “benevolent hegemon”—and offered a model that the autocrats could not duplicate.

What would it mean to rally democracies without fighting a new cold war, and without pretending to the status of undisputed leadership the United States had 70 years ago? The first order of business, as Biden notes in his Foreign Affairs essay, is “renewing democracy at home”—ending the assault on immigrants, minorities, public servants, and all the other targets of President Donald Trump’s nationalist abuse. This is one problem that Truman did not face, yet the Cold War liberals of his day, such as Hubert Humphrey, also recognized that the United States could not serve as a credible defender of democratic values unless it conspicuously practiced them at home, in their case by passing civil rights legislation and offering a generous welcome to displaced persons. Domestic reform thus enables reform abroad.

Then what? Biden has vowed to convene a “Summit for Democracy” in his first year. This is an idea that in recent years has been chiefly associated with neoconservatives, who are inclined to see the divisions of the world in ideological rather than strictly geopolitical terms. Yet that premise has been migrating toward the center. Last year, in what now seems a straw in the wind, Tony Blinken, Biden’s longtime national security aide and the head of the campaign’s vast network of foreign-policy advisors, joined up with the neocon Robert Kagan to call for a “league”—not just a summit—of democracies.

A cautious, fine-grained thinker, Blinken says that he was pleasantly surprised to discover how much common ground he shared with the far more doctrinal Kagan. Nevertheless, he stipulated that what he and Biden have in mind is not a “crusade” but a medium for collective action. “Your base in the world are other democracies,” as Blinken put it. But not, perhaps, all democracies: On many issues, emerging-world democracies like India and Brazil feel much more like part of the problem than part of the solution. Biden’s vision is far more Atlanticist. The core members of his envisioned body would be Europe plus South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—America’s traditional allies.

Are the Democrats Downplaying Biden’s Record?

They keep touting him as a man of “character” and “empathy.” But that may not be enough to define him for the electorate.

What Biden and his advisors have in mind is not a formal institution like NATO but a forum, a kind of expanded G-7, in which democratic allies can work out common solutions to the transnational problems Kahl was thinking of—pandemics or cybersecurity or, of course, climate change—as well as the specific issues presented by the rise of authoritarian states, including election interference, surveillance technology, and China’s role in 5G technology. To put it in the most grandiose terms, Biden would refound “the West” for a new age of problems without borders.

This new orientation also implies a new geopolitical tilt—a pivot to Europe. It has been left to Germany, France, and a few others to stand up to Russia, and increasingly to China, and to speak out against illiberalism inside Europe. In a recent article in the Washington Monthly, Julie Smith, another former Biden official and member of the inner circle of advisors, suggested that the next president travel to Germany within 100 days of taking office and deliver a major speech to “redefine the transatlantic agenda around the concept of defending democratic values.”

The equivalent for Obama of this ingathering-of-the-West address was, of course, the June 2009 speech in Cairo in which he called for “a new beginning” between the United States and Islam. Obama’s Middle Eastern adventure brought him nothing but tears.

Much though he wanted to pivot to Asia, a region of stable nation-states, Obama never pulled more than one leg out of the Middle Eastern quagmire. Biden may have better luck showing the Arab world his back (for reasons to be explored in a future column).

“Lead” is of course a word as loaded as “free world.” Conservatives mocked the expression “lead from behind,” which they believed summed up Obama’s philosophy. Progressives and realists of the left, in contrast, flinch at invocations of the burdens of leadership, which they associate with regime change, drone warfare, and imperial hubris. As Andrew Bacevich of the Quincy Institute recently wrote, “for too long, ruling elites allowed the purported obligations of global leadership to take precedence over tending to the collective wellbeing of the American people.”

Bacevich argues that “the era of US dominion has now passed.” Biden does not believe that. He really does regard the United States as the “indispensable nation,” in Madeleine Albright’s much-mocked formulation, and he tends to attract aides who do too. In an article in the Atlantic last year, Jake Sullivan, another former national security official who now occupies a unique position as an advisor on both foreign and domestic policy, argued that, thanks to its capacity for self-renewal, its pragmatism, and its commitment to a doctrine of enlightened self-interest, the United States remains uniquely capable of world leadership, albeit in the more modest role of first among equals. In words guaranteed to vex the left, Sullivan called for “a new American exceptionalism” to restore the nation’s place atop the global order.

That does sound more like a daydream than a plan of action. After all, Obama issued much the same promise of renewal, and Americans chose to replace him with Trump. Both world leaders and ordinary citizens have concluded that the United States is not the country they thought it was. And Joe Biden is no Franklin D. Roosevelt. Of course, that’s what they said about Truman.

**By: James Traub**

**Source: Foreign Policy Magazine**

## The Ehsaas experience

In 2017, I was a candidate to become the next director-general of the World Health Organization. At the 70th World Health Assembly, I stood before health ministers from around the world and warned that three things could destroy the planet: a celestial event, a third world war, or a pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic may not have destroyed the planet, but it is certainly putting public and private institutions to a harsh test. In addition to its dire health consequences, the pandemic has decimated livelihoods worldwide, squeezing the middle class and pushing low-income households into abject poverty.

In Pakistan – the world’s fifth-largest country by population – 24 million breadwinners rely on daily wages or are self-employed in the informal economy. For them, life came to a standstill with the implementation of a lockdown in March, causing a widespread loss of income that began fueling civil unrest and rioting.

To mitigate the pandemic’s socioeconomic damage, Pakistan’s government created the Ehsaas Emergency Cash program, the largest social-protection program in the country’s history. Rolled out ten days after lockdown began, it is delivering one-time cash grants totaling more than \$1.2 billion to more than 16.9 million households, covering around 109 million people – approximately 50 percent of the country’s population. Recipient families are given Rs12,000 (\$75) to cover their immediate subsistence needs.

Prior to the delivery of Ehsaas cash, I saw unspeakable suffering among people from many walks of life. There were day laborers and hawkers, hotel and restaurant staff, and domestic servants, security guards, and drivers. There were also laid-off public-transport employees, fishermen and miners, beauticians and barbers, and millions of shopkeepers – all on the verge of hunger, with their savings used up. They, along with private-school teachers, electricians, welders, painters, carpenters, plumbers, car mechanics, taxi drivers, and construction workers, did not know where their next meal would come from.

These stories were repeated across industries and regions, with even those used to earning a decent living suddenly wondering if their finances would ever add up again. But the handouts brought stability and comfort to millions of families, and the whole country watched as countless tragedies were averted.

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Beyond the immediate crisis, the success of Ehsaas Emergency Cash offers Pakistan and other middle- and low-income countries invaluable experience in speedily delivering a massive national program in a complex and uncertain context. In order to share this knowledge, the government recently released a report describing the knowhow we gained through the program's design and implementation, as well as the operational challenges we encountered and how they were addressed.

The program's end-to-end digital approach, with transparency hardwired into its design, offers lessons about how to leverage personal identification systems. By combining phones, Internet connectivity, and national IDs, a digital, demand-based social-protection system can be created to enable those in distress to seek support during crises. And it demonstrates how cash transfer programs can be deployed to counter the adverse socioeconomic consequences of external shocks, such as Covid-19.

For Pakistan, this was a watershed moment in terms of government functioning. The crisis compelled the government to be more responsive, data-driven, experimental, and ambitious. Cost-effective digital methods of working, new ways to coordinate the activities of multiple stakeholders, and a whole-of-government approach have been institutionalized. These measures will transform policymaking in a post-Covid-19 world.

Finally, the legacy of the program goes beyond short-term relief. Built into its design are long-term goals to strengthen the safety net and increase financial inclusion, both of which will bring lasting benefits to recipients and to Pakistan as a whole. Alongside this is a commitment to transparency and accountability, which is the underlying motivation for the publication of the report. In order for democracies to ensure progress, a culture of integrity and openness must be ingrained in government institutions and processes.

History shows that disasters and their tragic consequences can be a catalyst of large-scale social change. Covid-19 has presented Pakistan with an urgent and unprecedented challenge, which could be met only by a program with the scale and ambition of Ehsaas Emergency Cash.



In the wake of the pandemic, we must embrace the once-in-a-generation chance to replicate this ambition globally and build a fairer world that overcomes poverty, inequality, and the climate crisis, with social protection as a core pillar of that effort.

The world has not faced a more difficult challenge since the end of World War II. But in our darkest hour, we can find a way forward by collectively deciding to move toward a fairer, greener, and more sustainable world for all.

**By: Dr. Sania Nishtar**

**Source: The News**

*The writer is the special assistant to the prime minister on poverty alleviation and social protection.*

Mega Lecture



## Lebanon between Israel and France

On August 4, two consecutive explosions rocked the port of Beirut, in Lebanon. The extremely powerful twin blasts left a 43-metre deep crater in the port and a \$3 billion destruction to the city.

Was this blast a result of negligence or was it a terror attack? Owing to Lebanon's weak governance, perhaps this question, of how the 2,750 kilograms of dry, granular ammonium nitrate lying at the port for the past six years, turned into an explosion all of a sudden, without the aid of an equal amount of explosive material around it, will remain unanswered.

The twin blasts remind us of the 9/11 Twin Towers on two accounts, because it too was never conclusively resolved and like 9/11, the Beirut blast will also change the way things are done around the world. Perhaps the loss of 200 lives, wounding 6,000 and the displacement of 300,000 from their shattered homes, will help in altering the equation of the Middle East that has gone all wrong in Iraq and Syria, and where Lebanon has long been seen as a ticking bomb that Israel is all too ready to strike at.

The narrative of Israel being behind this attack is not without precedence. After the last Israel-Hezbollah war (2006), skirmishes have been ongoing between the two, and Hezbollah has only been emboldened by Iran's presence in Syria, and Israel has become increasingly wound up of their presence since then.

In 2017, when President Michel Aoun said of Hezbollah that it is an integral part of the country's government and that "as long as Israel continues to occupy lands... we feel the need to have the resistance army" and that "it is an essential part of Lebanon's defense", Israel's defense minister Naftali Bennett had given a vicious reply that the "next Lebanon War must hit civilians where it hurts... Lebanese institutions, its infrastructure, airport, power stations, traffic junctions, Lebanese Army bases — they should all be legitimate targets if a war breaks out...". These types of threats have been repeated, only last month Netanyahu when threatened of "a powerful response" and that "Hezbollah is playing with fire."

And there has been more precedence — Israel's failure to annex the West Bank decisively on its intended date because of international pressure and for fear of a Palestinian intifada, and because especially when Hezbollah stands as the last

bastion of active resistance in the Middle East, just across the border in Lebanon, doesn't make Beirut an easy pill to swallow. Some might think that making the UAE diplomacy move indicates that Israel wants to slow down and make more grounds in the Gulf before making a decisive move. But others would know that the reaping from the twin blasts and the UAE move were two very long jumps taken under the cover of a seemingly lost annexation. The same Lebanon that the French had carved out of Syria in 1926 under their mandate, as a Christian anchor and gateway into the Middle East, that would become a pillar of support for Israel, has now become the thorn in the flesh that is making the reaping of Middle East for Israel ever more difficult.

And how do you reap the Beirut Explosion? First, in this utter devastation, hundreds of protesters hit the streets of Lebanon, many showing placards against their government, against Hezbollah; and as the whole cabinet resigns under pressure of these protests, then they literally demand that Lebanon should go back under the French mandate.

One should not be so naïve as to forget the previous Arab Springs, when same such placards calling for NATO's intervention were shown on mainstream media. One should not forget how social media and a bunch of protesters were used then too. So, is Lebanon bracing for a final Arab Spring?

Macron's readiness certainly shows that he was prepared for the act; within three days he was in the middle of the protesters in the streets of Beirut, promising that he would be the saviour of Lebanon. He said, "France will never let Lebanon go", just like it hasn't let go so many of the Francophone states in north and sub-Saharan Africa, where it still holds political and military sway. Only that these things don't get space in the mainstream media, where France is portrayed as a weakening state.

Surely, the Lebanese government is to blame for the \$80 billion debt they have incurred upon their people. They must go. But should not all those international organisations go too that create this kind of debt trap for already failing economies — repeating the same they did to Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus before?

So, what are the "profound changes" that arrogant Macron has demanded before he returns to Beirut, his "newly-found kingdom of hope" on September 1? They are

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“significant reforms in the energy sector, customs, public markets and Lebanese central bank”, perhaps another version of the CEDRE 2018 Conference in Paris, wherein liberal budget reforms were enacted on the Lebanese economy. Note here that ‘liberal’ means ‘austerity’ for the people and ‘open-markets’ for corporate investors. So that while investors sip cheap oil from the bays of Lebanon, the people would be getting ‘more loans’ just to survive.

In this backdrop, Lebanon has also received a Russian delegation headed by the Deputy Minister for Civil Defense and Emergencies and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif, both offering to repair Beirut. And perhaps, Lebanon must be at this time, weighing between a Western intervention or a Russian/Iranian intervention, a bitter choice they will have to make, because French and British warships have already docked in Lebanon’s ruined port on the pretext of bringing aid. Palestinians will also be eagerly looking at the choice made, because they too are stuck between docile Arab states who would rather give them away for retaining their comfortable status quo — and an Iran-Syria-Russia influence that will help the resistance and keep the Palestine Cause alive.

Last year when the United States recognised Golan Heights as part of Israel, President Aoun visited Russia, offering Putin to make a counter-US-Middle East policy. Lebanon hosts a million Syrian refugees, refugees that Europe won’t accept. Refugees that were created because of France and Britain’s backing of the Syrian war. Aoun talked to Putin about helping the return of these refugees and gave Russian oil giant Rosneft a contract for northern Lebanon oilfields; perhaps the battle for Lebanon had started then!

**By: Aneela Shahzad**

**Source: The Express Tribune**

## **Nietzsche's superman, Islam, and Covid-19 ( Part II)**

Examining the qualities of Nietzsche's Superman figures we may deduce some broad characteristics: they have a sense of destiny; something is driving them to spread their message and understanding to the world. They are generally protective of the weak and the vulnerable and concerned about the minorities. They are inclined to see the big picture and are not so concerned about minor things that may occupy other people. They are bold and independent in their thinking which often causes opposition and controversy. Their actions have an impact on distant places and into the future of which perhaps even they are not aware. Because they are extraordinary in their lives and aspirations, they are often lonely even though surrounded by followers and admirers.

They find followers rather than companions. They often spend time by themselves, retreating to isolated caves and mountains. They are brilliant in their strategic choices and moves. They are not always successful and since they are creating new ideas and challenging old ones, they often suffer a backlash that may even cost them their lives in the process. Even after they die, they cross time and space and remain alive in the imagination of their followers. As Nietzsche's list of his own figures who approached and approximated the Superman is subjective and personal, each one of us is entitled to drawing up our own list. It is an exercise to be recommended as it will tell us as much about ourselves as our society.

Nietzsche followed Goethe in his admiration for the Prophet of Islam. Nietzsche compared the Prophet to Plato, one of the foundational figures of Western civilization. For Nietzsche, Plato "thought he could do for all the Greeks what Muhammad did later for his Arabs"

When Nietzsche's Zarathustra went up the mountain seeking a species of Superman, he did not quite appreciate that they were in plain sight all along. Indeed, the concept of the Superman is not new. We have examples from the past going back several thousand years of figures who could justifiably be called Superman, from Moses, who parted the sea, turned his staff into a snake that ate up the Pharaoh's snake, and climbed a mountain to talk to God, to Jesus Christ, who walked on water and gave life to a corpse. There are other figures such as the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II who brought the different religions and communities in his empire closer together through scholarship and in mutual

respect. In Hindu mythology we have examples of ancient heroes performing superhuman feats. Most societies have their own towering figures that they view as supermen-or superwomen. So, while among Christians, Jesus is the ultimate Superman, among Hindus it is Lord Ram, among Buddhists Lord Buddha, and so on. Plato's philosopher-king was a prototype Superman and Alexander the Great was seen as an early Greek version of the Superman. Earlier in Nietzsche's century, Thomas Carlyle had written his celebrated *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* which was similar in scope to Nietzsche's Superman idea and included several figures such as the Prophet of Islam, Rousseau and Napoleon that could over-lap with those on Nietzsche's own list.

#### "Insan-i Kamil": The Prophet as the Muslim Superman

For Muslims, the figure of the Superman is represented by the Prophet of Islam. The Quran stated that God created man to be God's vicegerent on earth; a super superman if you will. The high status and expectations of man are inherent in Islam's theological vision and philosophic understanding of the nature of man. That philosophic vision is suffused with the notions of compassion and mercy. This potential in man finds its ultimate expression in the Prophet of Islam, the model and example for Muslims to aspire to. God's greatest attributes are derived from his two most popular names-Rahman and Rahim-Compassionate and Merciful and as he is the Messenger of God the Prophet is described in the Quran as a "mercy unto mankind." The Prophet is known in the Islamic tradition as Insan-i Kamil or the Perfect Man, the equivalent of the Superman, and he is also called Khayr ul Bashr, or the best of mankind.

There are indeed interesting parallels between Nietzsche's Superman and the Perfect Man in the Islamic tradition as personified by the Prophet. Is there a more direct relationship between the two concepts? Did the way that Muslims conceive of the Prophet of Islam, in turn, influence the construct of *Urbemensch* or the Superman? If so what are the intellectual links to possible sources that we can trace? The clues are many although some are admittedly weak. Yet it is worth exploring some of the connections which may heighten our understanding of both concepts and their similarities.

Nietzsche may have been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the Islamic notion of the Perfect Man through sources such as Goethe, his number one exemplary role model for the Superman. While Goethe wrote his devotional poem in honor of the Prophet called "Mahomet's Song" at the age of 23, at age 70 he publicly declared he was considering "devoutly celebrating that holy night in which the Quran in its entirety was revealed to the prophet from on high." Goethe's comments on Islam have led to speculation about the extent of his commitment to the faith, for example, in the following verse: "If Islam means, to God devoted/ All live and die in Islam's ways." In fact, Goethe himself sometimes wondered if he was actually living the life of a Muslim, writing, when announcing the publication of his poetic work West-Eastern Divan, that the author "does not reject the suspicion that he may himself be a Muslim."

No Muslim can be unmoved by Goethe's poem, "Mahomet's Song," dedicated to the Prophet of Islam, whom he calls "chief" and "head of created beings." Goethe had intended to write a longer piece in which Hazrat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and himself a Superman figure as a great scholar and warrior, was to have sung the poem "in honor of his master," but the project was never completed. "Mahomet's Song" is a powerful expression of the desire to discover unity in the universe while searching for the divine. Goethe uses the metaphor of an irresistible stream that flows down from the mountains to the ocean, taking other streams along with it. Here are some verses from the poem:

"And the streamlets from the mountain,

Shout with joy, exclaiming: 'Brother,

Brother, take thy brethren with thee,

With thee to thine aged father,

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To the everlasting ocean,

Who, with arms outstretching far,

Waiteth for us...

And the meadow

In his breath finds life.”

Nietzsche followed Goethe in his admiration for the Prophet of Islam. Nietzsche compared the Prophet to Plato, one of the foundational figures of Western civilization. For Nietzsche, Plato “thought he could do for all the Greeks what Muhammad did later for his Arabs.” Muslims, who have been fascinated by Greek philosophers like Plato, have invariably seen the Prophet of Islam as the philosopher-king that Plato dreamed of and the Muslim community, as in the example of the early settlement in Medina, as the realization of Plato’s ideal City. Nietzsche also followed Goethe in his admiration for the great Persian poet Hafiz. Nietzsche wrote a poem extolling the heroic virtues of Hafiz including the fact that Hafiz was a “water drinker”-along with Christianity the drinking of alcohol was one of Nietzsche’s bugaboos about Europe. In Thus Spake Zarathustra, Zarathustra is referred to as “a born water drinker.” The poem Nietzsche wrote in honor of Hafiz is entitled “To Hafiz: Questions of a Water Drinker.” It is worth reminding the reader that Islam forbids the drinking of alcohol and Muslims are thus quintessential water drinkers.

In spite of the potential for research, the interest in Islam of Goethe and Nietzsche has been relatively unexplored and even neglected. There are many dissertations

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waiting for the diligent researcher in this field. Most Germans, who acknowledge Goethe as the Shakespeare of the German language and the classic Renaissance man, do not know about Goethe's enthusiasm for Islam, which lasted his entire life. Bekir Albo?a, the secretary general of Germany's largest Islamic organization, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), when interviewed for my project Journey into Europe in Cologne, described Goethe as "a brother to me," and "a great thinker with a great affinity for Islam." Goethe "wrote a wonderful poem about our Prophet," he said, referring to "Mahomet's Song." Albo?a complained that in Germany the Islamic dimension of Goethe's work is ignored, if not intentionally suppressed. As for the subject of Nietzsche and Islam that too remains largely uncharted territory. (For a detailed discussion of attitudes to Muslims in contemporary Europe see my book Journey into Europe: Islam, Immigration and Identity, 2018). Nietzsche, Islam, and Christianity.

**By: Akbar Ahmed**

**Source: Daily Times**

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## **Belarus's struggle is a powerful reminder of the value of freedom**

Of all the moving scenes from Belarus, one sticks in my mind. A man, probably in his 30s, holds his child on his arm. “The election was ... ” he says to the camera, pauses nervously for a long moment, glances sideways at his child, and then concludes explosively, “falsified!” There you have the exact moment, crucial for any protest movement against any dictatorship, when the individual breaks through the barrier of fear. Yesterday, he would not have dared to complete that sentence in public. Today, he will find himself among tens of thousands who are shouting the same thing at the top of their voices, waving the red and white flag that stands for a better Belarus. Speak out for the future of the child on your arm.

Events in Belarus now join a long line of anti-Soviet and anti-post-Soviet protest movements – some of which succeeded, some of which failed. “Colour revolutions” is a flimsy, politically compromised term that offers much too short a perspective. Since Belarus is the most Soviet of all the post-Soviet states, you can reach back even as far as the East German protests in 1953. When you see workers in large state factories confronting Alexander Lukashenko face to face, and reportedly forming an inter-factory strike committee, you are in Poland in 1980. Or perhaps it’s more like Armenia in 2018? Or Ukraine in 2014? Or – the unavoidable reference – the central European revolutions of 1989? And don’t forget that Belarusians themselves have tried several times before. This is not the first election Lukashenko has falsified.

Every time, we recognise elements from earlier instances of civil resistance, but there is always something new. Here it is the role of the “women in white” who join hands in human chains of non-violent protest and make a perfect theatrical contrast to Lukashenko, that pig-headed epitome of the chauvinist bully. To try to guess how this will end is a fool’s errand. In such moments, nobody knows what is going to happen this afternoon, let alone tomorrow. But it is not too soon to spell out one clear message from the streets of Belarus.

In a review of Anne Applebaum’s new book, *Twilight of Democracy*, the political scientist Ivan Krastev admonishes her – and us – not to make the ideals and “self-evident truths” of 1989 the starting point for remaking today’s world. This all depends what you think was the “self-evident truth” of 1989. If you think it was

that history would unfold smoothly and inevitably towards western-type liberal democracy, then obviously that was and would always be mistaken.

I personally would love Belarus to become a liberal democracy, secure inside both the EU and Nato like its Baltic neighbours. But that will not happen any time soon, mainly because Vladimir Putin won't let it, but also because there is currently no majority for it in the country itself. The Belarusian opposition wisely insists this is not a geopolitical struggle between Russia and the west.

In Minsk a few years ago, I heard the Belarusian foreign minister evoke the shimmering prospect of Belarus becoming a prosperous neutral country between the EU and Russia, "something like Switzerland". Who wouldn't settle for being Switzerland? Yet realistically, a messy, negotiated transition to another, less autocratic leadership, as in Armenia, is probably the best we can hope for in the near future – and with Lukashenko, things may get worse before they get better. One worker at the Minsk tractor factory where Lukashenko was heckled, gave this impressively downbeat assessment: "The oligarch who runs the factory next won't be any worse than the state is now."

Yet neo-Hegelian nonsense about a predetermined direction of history was not the original self-evident truth of 1989. That kind of western hubris was much more in evidence after the transition in central Europe seemed to have succeeded, in the early years of this century, when some neoconservatives in the administration of George W Bush thought Iraq could be a new Poland and when the Arab Spring was hailed as the new 1989.

No, the self-evident truth of 1989 was that people who live for a long time under a dictatorship usually end up longing for freedom. And one day, they speak. "People are tired of lies, of not having freedom of speech," says Aleksandr, 41, an electricity worker. "We are celebrating freedom from dictatorship," says Marni, 23, a cafe owner. "A new collective spirit has woken and that spirit can never be put back in the bottle," says Lesya, 24, an anaesthetist. Here is the people's poetry, which will of course be followed by disappointing prose.

And now we have Cai Xia, a former professor at China's Central Party School, no less, telling the Guardian that change in the direction of democracy will one day come in China, too, because "people yearn for freedom and freedom is only possible when people's rights are protected, right?" Not for the first time, it takes

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those with long experience of unfreedom to remind us of the value and attraction of freedom.

When rightly dissecting the many failings of liberal democracy over the last 30 years, we risk falling into a kind of historical fatalism: a “twilight” of democracy, after all, must logically be followed by night. That would be to make the “here’s the direction of history” mistake once again, only in the opposite direction, and to give authoritarian rulers an undeserved and significant psychological advantage. Call me an American if you like, but I think we should believe more in the power of freedom – not least because that belief is itself a large part of freedom’s power.

**By: Timothy Garton Ash**

**Source: The Guardian**

*The writer is a Guardian columnist.*

## **The African Union's crisis of legitimacy**

On May 29, just four days after George Floyd's death in police custody, African Union Commission's Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat issued a scorching statement condemning the Black man's "murder ... at the hands of law enforcement officers" and reaffirmed "the African Union's rejection of the continuing discriminatory practices against Black citizens of the United States of America".

A few weeks earlier in April, following the news of the Chinese government's mistreatment of Africans living in the city of Guangzhou, Mahamat summoned China's ambassador to the African Union, Liu Yuxi, to express the body's extreme displeasure with anti-African racism in the country.

Taken on their own, despite admittedly not making much difference on the ground, the African Union's public condemnation of racial discrimination and police brutality targeting Black people in China and the US could be seen as a reaffirmation of the continental body's stated commitment to promoting universal human rights.

The Union's actions - or rather, its careless inaction and passivity - in Africa, however, tells a completely different story.

On March 27, the first day of South Africa's COVID-19 lockdown, two police officers assaulted 56-year-old Petrus Miggels in Cape Town. He died shortly after that beating. His only crime was allegedly breaking the country's strict lockdown rules by purchasing alcoholic drinks from a nearby shop.

Following Miggels' sad and mystifying demise, the African Union not only failed to launch an investigation, it did not even issue a simple statement of condemnation. This disturbing act of police brutality, it seemed, was not worthy of the AU's attention.

Why would the AU condemn Floyd's death in Minneapolis, but wholly disregard Miggels' suspicious death on the Cape Flats? Why would it express "extreme concern" about the maltreatment of Africans in China, but fail to caution South Africa for killing one of its own citizens, in broad daylight, under the guise of implementing COVID-19 lockdown rules?

Police brutality and abuse of power in South Africa, after all, is as systematic, widespread and deadly as it is in the US.

South Africans reportedly lodged 42,365 criminal complaints against the police between April 2012 and March 2019. Amongst others, the reports included allegations of rape, torture, assault and murder. Still, despite the severity, consistency and enormity of the complaints, South Africa has avoided being investigated or publicly rebuked by the African Union to this day. The African Union was similarly passive in the face of growing human rights abuses in neighbouring Zimbabwe.

Earlier this month, the small and perennially troubled southern African country was accused of stifling dissent after forcefully crushing an anti-corruption demonstration planned for July 31 and arresting scores of journalists and activists who criticised the government for the economic collapse, deepening poverty, corruption, and human rights abuses in the country. The situation swiftly deteriorated to the extent where, on August 6, South Africa announced its decision to appoint two special envoys to Harare to help resolve "difficulties that the Republic of Zimbabwe is experiencing".

The Zimbabwean authorities responded to the news with fury, and in an explosive news conference accused the South African government of being "completely out of order". Pointing out South Africa's own despicable human rights record, especially its brutal response to the 2012 Marikana miners' strike which resulted in the deaths of dozens, they urged their neighbour to refrain from intervening in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

On August 7, as the situation in Zimbabwe became one of the main discussion topics on the continent, the African Union finally felt the need to say something on the issue.

In an official statement, Mahamat urged Zimbabwe "to uphold the rule of law allowing for freedom of the media, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and the right to information", and welcomed South Africa's decision to appoint special envoys to the country.

In his restrained rebuke of the Zimbabwean government, Mahamat also stated that Harare's actions "are a breach of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance".

While the issuing of such a statement would have been appropriate in the face of a similar crisis in a country outside Africa, where the Union is not able or expected to lead the way in countering human rights abuses, it was not sufficient or acceptable in the context of Zimbabwe.

When it comes to systematic human rights abuses committed by delinquent member states like Zimbabwe, the African Union has a duty to do more than issue empty statements. It must take swift action, and where need be, institute strong disciplinary measures. If it does not, or cannot, what really is the African Union's current role in Africa?

In September 2019, for example, when Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi ordered a massive crackdown on anti-government protests, the Union said or did nothing to help the people of Egypt defend their most basic human rights.

Had the African Union stepped in to help restrain el-Sisi's tyrannical madness, had it urged its member states to break ranks with Egypt's illiberal regime and denounce its actions, it could have saved thousands of innocent people from ending up in prison. And, perhaps even more crucially, such groundbreaking actions, even if they failed to convince el-Sisi to change his repressive ways, would have signalled to other African leaders that the Union would not hesitate to take action if they abuse African citizens.

But, as the recent surge in cases of police brutality, unlawful arrests and questionable deaths in Uganda, Mali, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe demonstrate, Africa's leaders are unmoved by the African Union's authority and impressive charters. The organisation's supposed ability to translate the heaps of signed declarations and agreements that it routinely refers to in press statements into implementable and sustainable policy and actions has proved tremendously limited.

The African Union's timid, imbalanced and disorganised approach to promoting democracy and human rights is allowing oppressive regimes to operate with impunity on the continent. The Union must establish a robust surveillance system



to monitor systemic repression and police brutality in member states or risk becoming irrelevant to the development of democracy in Africa.

It is great to see the African Union taking a principled stance against human rights abuses outside Africa, from China to the US, but until it actually takes action against abuses on its doorstep, it cannot justify its existence and avoid becoming irrelevant.

**By: Tafi Mhaka**

**Source: Al Jazeera**

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Mega Lecture

## Post-Covid-19 education crisis: what next?

In most countries the academic year was fast approaching its tail-end and many countries adopted different strategies to address this crisis. In Pakistan, students from grade 1-8 were auto promoted and a unanimous decision was made through the Inter Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC) for promotion of secondary and higher secondary students based on the recommendations of the IBCC. So what's next?

Education systems in Pakistan and around the world are working to respond to the unexpected outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Globally, 188 countries closed education institutions, leading to an estimated 1.60 billion students unable to attend schools. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the education system of Pakistan encompasses over 317,000 schools with enrolment of almost 50.3 million students and over 1.83 million teachers. The system is further composed of almost 197,000 public schools and over 120,000 private schools. The public sector provides access to about 28.68 million students to complete their education while the remaining 21.60 million students are catered by the private sector of education.

According to an ASER report, private schooling in Pakistan has significant presence (around 40 percent, according to both number of schools and student enrolment) both in urban and rural areas with several tiers in terms of quality standards. The majority of the private schools in Pakistan are low-cost affordable private schools catering to the middle class and poor families who pay very low fees.

These low-cost private schools have been seen to produce better academic outcomes than public-sector schools in Pakistan. Several studies show that in public schools almost 50 percent of grade 5 students cannot read or write basic sentences of English or Urdu of grade 2 level. This continues to lead to low parental confidence in public sector schools; therefore, Pakistan has witnessed massive growth in low-cost private schooling.

During the current pandemic, over 50.0 million schoolgoing children have been unable to attend school for the past four months as the government continues to keep schools closed to ensure the health and safety of students and teachers. We already have over 22.5 million children that are out of school.

The post-COVID impact due to the prolonged closure of school will have a massive impact on Pakistan's already fragile education system, such as learning gaps, and social/emotional/mental well-being. This could also lead to no promotion next year, ultimately leading to a halt in continuity of education.

The prolonged closure of schools has put the entire private education system into a deeper crisis. In private schools, the operational cost is dependent on revenue generated through school tuition fee with no financial support available from the government. Since the lockdown, the government has enforced a 20 percent discount in private school fee while many parents have refused to pay school fee at all.

According to the chairman of the Private Schools Association, on average, only 25-30 percent of the fee is being recovered, leading to extreme situations including closing of schools by the owners for good. Over a thousand schools have already been closed and many are planning to close-down as they are unable to meet their expenses such as rent, salaries, maintenance etc.

It is likely that hundreds more private schools will also close down their business leading to a high number of students' dropout, and unemployment of teaching and non-teaching staff. The government institutions do not have the capacity to absorb these students within their system. In contrast, public schools' operational cost is covered through taxpayer money; therefore, the response from the public-sector towards closure of schools remains neutral as compared to the private sector.

In mid-March 2020 for the majority of the schools the academic year was approaching its conclusion when the government announced to close down schools. An immediate response from both public and private schools was to shut down for a while. All academic activities came to a complete halt in the public sector; however, the private schools (majority schools with high fee structure) continued the learning process using online systems such as Google classroom, lectures via Zoom and even WhatsApp.

While some may argue that private schools continued the process of learning via basic or un-structured online system in order to collect school fee, some applauded the seriousness of private schools towards the importance of education. Both arguments could be true, however, we prefer to lean towards the latter and appreciate the positive attitude of the school leadership towards education.

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There is a high potential that some schools will be able to provide access to education via online education or blended learning and maintain social distancing. Since the closure of schools, public and many private schools are in the process of preparing alternative system to continue academics and the process of learning. Some ed-tech companies, have already entered into partnership with public and private schools to provide a structured teaching and learning solution in the form of Learning Management Systems (LMS) along with content aligned to the national curriculum. However, many students from rural areas (public and private sectors) and low-cost schools in urban area may not be able to meet the demand of on-line education (IT literacy, access to internet and hardware within and outside etc), therefore the issue of accessibility and affordability may continue to be a challenge, but this could be addressed in the next phase when the on-line education system matures in Pakistan.

The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to impact us for a long time. Millions of children have no access to school and for our already fragile education system this is indeed an unprecedented situation in the history of education. However, we must embrace this unexpected change and apply an alternate approach to ensure continuity in education.

The government should encourage and support private schools and revive this effective system of education. Parents also must not forget the positive role played by private schools for many years by delivering better quality education. It was primarily this deliverance of quality education that led to parents' trust and confidence in private sector schools. Abandoning them now will only harm the future of our children. If private schools cease operation, it will create a huge void in the education sector of the country as the public sector is already running beyond capacity.

**By: Shehzad Jeeva, Naveed Yousuf & Hanif Shariff**

**Source: The News**

*The writers are from the Aga Khan University Examination Board.*

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## The “Abraham accord”

On 13th August, 2020 UAE and Israel signed an US-brokered agreement that has come to be known as the ‘Abraham Accord’, implying that the three parties represented the three Abrahamic religions Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The announcement released following a joint call between President Trump, the Emirati crown prince and the Israeli prime minister-describes the agreement as a step toward the creation of a new “Strategic Agenda for the Middle East to expand diplomatic, trade, and security cooperation”.

On the surface, the agreement focusses on establishing ‘normal’ relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates including business relations, tourism, direct flights, scientific cooperation, and, in time, full diplomatic ties at the ambassadorial level. While the timeline for this process is not yet clear, UAE officials have indicated that “talks will start” in the coming weeks to implement normalization. An important but not specifically spelt out component of the Abraham Accord, is enhanced security cooperation against regional threats, especially from Iran and its proxies.

Under negotiation for quite some time brokered by the Trump administration. One can safely assume that US President Donald Trump speeded the process of the agreement so as to spur his re-election campaign for the November US Presidential Election.

The Abraham Accords comes after months of debate over loudly announced plans of the Israeli government to annex portions of the West Bank. Such a move if made would prevent the mutually agreed two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from ever becoming possible that the signed accord now stipulates that Israel will suspend such annexation in a plus point. However PM Netanyahu has subsequently insisted that suspension only means that it can be done later, the Emiratis are trying to nudge Israel to forego such a step, this could irreparably harm the prospect of a two-state solution.

If the Israelis want to live with their Muslim neighbours in peace and harmony they must seriously think of re-phrasing their national anthem

Israel and the UAE have been inching toward normalization in recent years. In 2015, Israel opened a diplomatic office in the Emirati capital of Abu Dhabi tied to the

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International Renewable Energy Agency; senior Israeli officials have visited Abu Dhabi; Israeli athletes have participated in regional competitions in the UAE; and Israel is set to participate in Dubai's World Expo 2020, which is now delayed to October 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Three Arab countries have already diplomatic relations with Israel, namely Egypt, Algeria and Qatar. Even though Erdogan has vociferously condemned the agreement, Turkey is the only non-Arab Muslim country with not only diplomatic relations, but an ongoing and active military programme with Israel. At least 12 Arab/Muslim countries also have contacts at various levels. A widely expected outcome of the Abraham Accord is that other Arab countries like Bahrain or Oman will soon follow suit.

What does this mean for the Palestinians? A geographic region in Western Asia, the name Palestine was used by ancient Greek writers, it was later used for the Roman province Syria Palaestina, the Byzantine Palaestina Prima, and the Islamic provincial district of Jund Filastin. It has been inhabited by Semitic people who over the centuries adhered to all the three Abrahamic religions. Located at the junction of Egypt, Syria, and Arabia, and being the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, the region has a tumultuous history as a crossroads for religion, culture, commerce, and politics. It has been controlled by numerous peoples, including Ancient Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites and Judeans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Achaemenids, ancient Greeks, the Jewish Hasmonean Kingdom, Romans, Parthians, Sasanians, Byzantines, the Arab Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates, Crusaders, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Mongols, Ottomans, the British, and modern Israelis, Jordanians, Egyptians and Palestinians.

The real problem started in the 19th century when nationalism and the idea of nation state spread through Europe and was exported by European colonialism to colonial territories. The idea of Israel became a powerful invention thought out by the German Jew Theodore Herzl in his book 'Der Judenstaat' (the Jewish state) published in 1896. He thus became the founder of Zionism, the nationalist movement that aimed at creating a Jewish state. While the British colonialists have their fair share in promoting nationalism not only among Jews but among Arabs as well (Lawrence of Arabia) and by allowing the settlement of waves of Jews in the British mandate territory of Palestine while flushing out the local Arab population neither the Balfour Declaration nor the UN plan of 1947 mandate the creation of a Jewish state by the name of Israel. The UN resolution 181 just recommended a

partition of Mandatory Palestine at the end of the British Mandate and the creation of two independent states one Arab Palestine and one Jewish state and a Special International Regime for the city of Jerusalem. Maps and borderlines were attached. Given the fact that UN resolutions have never helped to solve a problem but rather perpetuated it (Kashmir) the Zionists did not wait long but in 1948 declared the independence of the state of Israel, and the subsequent 1948 Arab-Israeli war saw Israel's establishment over most of the former Mandate territory, including the part that was meant to be the state of Palestine. Since then Israel in consecutive wars has annexed more Palestinian territory so that today the two-state solution is possible only with territorial adjustments.

Though consequences are not yet fully clear the recently concluded Abraham Accord does not bode well for the Palestinians. Arab solidarity – always on shaky ground – has taken another hit. While Saudi Arabia has not yet officially positioned itself Egypt and other Arab countries have welcomed the step. Turkey, with diplomatic relations with Israel since 1949 has threatened to cut diplomatic relations. A long-standing friend and security partner of Israel, India has naturally welcomed the deal. Pakistan has so far cautiously reacted and given the fact that Pakistani foreign policy has recently become somewhat ambiguous it can be assumed that the topic will be discussed during the COAS' visit to Saudi Arabia.

What should worry Pakistan is the security-related part of the agreement that is strongly anti-Iran though the word 'Iran' itself has not even been mentioned. It is important to note that Israel and the UAE reportedly already have security ties, but the agreement brings them into the open and formalizes and probably extends them. Pakistan is a direct neighbour of Iran, the country that first recognized Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan has a sizeable Shia population and while relations could be closer, they have improved a lot during recent years and offer attractive economic options. Given Pakistan's special relationship with Saudi Arabia there is no doubt that it is the unenviable task of our foreign policy makers to keep a fine balance between the sides

After visiting Israel in May 2003 I wrote an article entitled "Visiting the Forbidden Land", to quote, "At no time did I find any animosity or ill-feeling towards Pakistan, or Muslims for that matter. However a mistrust of the Palestinians was certainly there. However Except for a couple of retired persons, the Israelis generally

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acknowledged they would have to co-exist with Palestinians. Though not many relished the thought, because of Hamas in particular. Moving around Israel was like being in any European country with its stores, fast food outlets and chic boutiques, except that on the roadside and at bus stops you will occasionally find uniformed soldiers, young men and women carrying rifles. They are not on duty, they carry their personal weapons, when they go on leave. Reservists keep their personal weapons at home so that they can be at their pre-designated location bearing arms. Security was pretty tight but fear and apprehension were not so visible within Israel itself. This was in sharp contrast to the West Bank where you could see military vehicles in abundance and a palpable air of fear and suspicion between the Israelis and Palestinian pedestrians. In Jerusalem I travelled through the Christian, Jewish and Muslim quarters, without any restrictions. I managed a very special trip to the “Wailing Wall” and (at some risk to himself), into the adjoining tunnel where the excavations to discover the base of the ‘Second Temple’ were taking place”, unquote.

During my visit to old Jerusalem when Palestinian guards at the gates of the Holy sites were informed that I was a Pakistani, the Palestinian security personnel were unofficially deputed to take me on a conducted tour. I was privileged to say my Zohar prayers in Al-Aqsa itself and Asr prayers at the Dome of the Rock mosque.

To quote my article of 2003 further, “One cannot condone the Israeli brutality on the Palestinians in governing the Occupied Territories. But one must now search for a pragmatic means to end the occupation so as to mitigate the sufferings of the uprooted Palestinian millions. Suicide bombings, coming after 9/11, attracted an adverse world reaction and gave Israel an excuse to establish a boundary to keep a portion of the occupied territories it covets. The raging debate in Pakistan over Israel ranges from the sublime to the ridiculous. Why Jews are bad-mouthed in the country is a mystery. My parents, at least, never fed us this calumny. On coming into contact with Jews I found them to be as good (and as bad) human beings as anyone else. Why have we been demonising an entire race on the basis of religion? I certainly condemn the Israeli brutality against the Palestinians and have full sympathy for the plight of Palestinians. I also condemn ‘suicide bombings’ and the loss of innocent Israeli lives. Every action has a reaction and this deadly cycle must stop. I strongly feel that dialogue with Israel will bring them in from the cold and help in convincing them that a permanent peace based on co-existence with the

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Palestinians is possible. Recognition of Israel must not be weighed in terms of pluses and minuses of which one can enumerate many, but on the need to bring all human beings into the world's melting pot, irrespective of race, religion or creed. We must convince Israelis about our sincerity of purpose by reaching out to them. For that, we must recognise Israel's right to exist as a nation. If the cost of a permanent peace is to ensure an honorable place under the sun for Israel that is a very small price to pay".

One must note some offending words of the Israeli National Anthem, to quote "Let those who are our enemy shudder, Let all the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan tremble, Let the inhabitants of Babylon shudder, To loom over their skies, panic and terror from us, When we plant our spears in their chests, And we see their blood being shed, And their heads cut off". One can understand religious nationalistic zeal but why did Israel, a country that claims to be civilized and democratic, choose this rather bloodthirsty anthem of Zionist Israel carrying hateful religious slogans? If the Israelis want to live with their Muslim neighbors in peace and harmony they must seriously think of re-phrasing their national anthem.

There is a difference between recognition of a state and having diplomatic relations with it, there is a vast difference between 2003 with the changed geo-political circumstances and the present environment in 2020. While I feel we can recognise Israel but any diplomatic relations must be subject to substantial progress on the way they treat Palestinians and the establishment of the Palestinian State.

**By: Ikram Sehgal**

**Source: Daily Times**

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