

WORLD TIMES INSTITUTE

Europe's Geopolitical Awakening

Europe has been a geopolitical nonentity since the 1990s. With the largest economy in the world, 450 million people, and defense spending comparable to Russia's, the continent could be a colossus. Yet Europe has never come close to equaling the combined clout of its constituent countries. Beset by chronic economic, political, and institutional limitations and crises, the European Union has for the last three decades exerted remarkably little influence on global affairs. Europe's most powerful member states, meanwhile, have either seen their sway diminish, as France has, or, like Germany, resisted taking up the mantle of international leadership.

U.S. analysts have come to see European fecklessness as a given. In 2011, Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote that in the twenty-first century "Europe's influence on affairs beyond its borders will be sharply limited." Not only has Brussels disappointed Washington by refusing to share more of the burden of collective security but it has punched well below its diplomatic weight on matters of global import.

Now, suddenly, Europe is stirring. The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have awakened the continent from its decades-long economic and political slumber and reinvigorated the EU integration project in ways that were unimaginable just six months ago. Jean Monnet, one of the founding architects of the European Union, famously said that "Europe will be forged in crises." This crisis may forge a Europe that is more confident and more assertive on the world stage—one that will help strengthen and define the twenty-first-century global order.

BRUSSELS UNBOUND

COVID-19 initially devastated Europe, as it did much of the world. But by implementing aggressive lockdowns, following scientists' recommendations, and supporting wage workers, the EU and its member states were able to bring the pandemic under relative control and stave off an economic collapse. In turn, Europe gained global prestige—and confidence. In recent months, European

leaders have made a series of uncharacteristically assertive moves. After China imposed a new national security law on Hong Kong in June, the EU condemned China and called the law “deplorable.” The EU further agreed to limit exports to Hong Kong of sensitive equipment such as technology that could be used for surveillance. In July, for the first time, the EU imposed cyber-sanctions on China, Russia, and North Korea. And this month, European leaders condemned the fraudulent election in Belarus and have opened a dialogue with the Kremlin aimed at forestalling Russian intervention.

The EU was able to bring the pandemic under relative control and stave off an economic collapse.

But by far the most significant step European leaders have taken since the beginning of the pandemic was to pass a \$2 trillion economic recovery package. In one fell swoop, the EU closed the book on a decade of crushing economic austerity, which had contributed to the rise of populism, reduced support for the EU, and put the euro perpetually on the verge of economic crisis. Combined with the enormous stimulus spending of individual European states, the rescue package puts Europe on course for a strong economic recovery. It also opens the door to a significant expansion of the EU’s federal powers. The deal may enable the EU to borrow, tax, and spend like an actual state. Should another crisis emerge—a pandemic, a debt or migration crisis, or something else—the EU will have the ability to generate the resources to respond.

The EU has never before enjoyed such powers. The process of integrating Europe and creating a stronger federal structure has occurred in fits and starts since World War II, with major advances followed by long periods of stasis. **Since the Lisbon Treaty, which set the rules for the EU, came into force in 2009, Europe had been stuck with a hybrid political system—part federal state, part multilateral organization. Where the EU was empowered, Brussels emerged as a global player—for instance, in the regulation of global markets.** As Columbia Law School’s Anu Bradford has argued, the EU’s enormous economy and consumer base give it the power to set standards for markets around the world. But where the EU must seek consensus from its member states, including on foreign policy, it has been consistently hobbled.

The EU has never before enjoyed such powers.

The agreement on the recovery package has opened up a new set of possibilities. Faced with an economic crisis of epic proportions, European leaders suddenly appear willing to push the boundaries of Brussels's powers, perhaps through the reinterpretation of EU rules. Some EU policymakers are calling to drop the requirement for unanimity in foreign policy decisions in favor of a "qualified majority." As Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, explained, "It would be better to adopt a strong and substantial position by a majority rather than unanimously adopting a weak position with little substance." Such a change would require the unanimous agreement of EU member states—an unlikely outcome at the moment. But the COVID-19 pandemic has breathed new life into the Franco-German alliance, which has historically advocated for a stronger EU. If the EU, hampered by its hybrid system, can't forge a stronger and more cohesive approach to foreign policy, EU leaders—especially the French and Germans—will call for reform more loudly than ever before.

EUROPEANS LOOK TO EUROPE

Europe's geopolitical awakening has not come completely out of the blue. As the U.S.-Chinese rivalry intensified during Donald Trump's presidency, Europe began to gingerly adjust its approach to a world increasingly defined by great-power competition. The European Union began debating the notion of "strategic autonomy," which calls for Europe to defend its sovereignty and advance its interests independently from the United States. But in the midst of a pandemic, strategic autonomy looks less like a concept for EU leaders to debate and more like an urgent policy to enact. Instead of looking to an American ally that has grown abusive under Trump or to an increasingly aggressive China for global leadership, European leaders are finding they have to look to Europe.

Part of this change has been driven by the United States' catastrophic response to COVID-19 and by the simultaneous spilling of racial tensions out onto its streets. European support for the transatlantic alliance had already slipped as a result of the excesses of the U.S. "war on terror," the bungled invasion of Iraq, and the 2008 financial crisis. But the Trump administration's recent failures raise deeper questions about the United States' basic ability to govern itself. European policymakers worry that even if former Vice President Joe Biden wins the White

House in November, the United States will be so preoccupied by internal challenges that Europe may not be able to depend on U.S. global leadership.

But the shift in Europe's outlook is also a response to China. Europe had long seen China primarily through an economic lens. It hoped that openness and trade would lead to political liberalization and even to democratization in China. But as China's economy blossomed, its politics constricted further. Openness proved to be a one-way street, causing frustration with China's unfair trade practices to mount in Europe, just as it did in the United States. The pandemic turned European public opinion decisively against China. Beijing sought to obscure the origins of the virus, and once it had gotten the disease under control at home, it embarked on an aggressive campaign of "wolf warrior" diplomacy that alarmed and alienated Europeans.

Europe is entering this new decade more confident in its union and less confident in others.

If changing perceptions of the United States and China have factored into Europe's sudden assertiveness in foreign policy, so have Europe's perceptions of itself. COVID-19 has convinced large majorities of Europeans of the need for greater EU cooperation. Sensing the shift in popular sentiment, European leaders took dramatic economic action. Europe is entering this new decade more confident in its union and less confident in others.

The EU won't turn into a superpower overnight, and it may never do so. The grand project of building a federal union may remain a perpetual work in progress. The EU still faces tremendous internal challenges—from populist politicians and the continued strength of the nation-state, from economic divergence between north and south, and from an internal democratic deficit that invites justified skepticism of Brussels. But there can be little doubt that Europe will emerge from this crisis a stronger, more unified global player.

That is good news for the United States. Europe can be an important U.S. partner, especially as the United States' rivalry with China intensifies. Washington should encourage Europe's rise where it can. It should also stop obsessing about what Europe lacks, such as capable militaries. Instead, it should focus on what Europe has: an effective diplomatic corps, the world's largest economy, and growing global

prestige. The twenty-first century may not be a European century, but for it to be a liberal century, Europe will have to play a leading role.

By: Max Bergmann

Source: Foreign Affairs

Mega Lecture

Democrats must understand that hugs and empathy can't defeat Trump

I missed the balloons, the streamers, the strutting around the stage. I missed the lines carefully calibrated for applause and the veering off-script. I missed the theatricality. But the revolution is now streaming. The pandemic meant the Democratic convention was televised online, in four nights of two-hour party political broadcasts.

There was no pizza big enough for this endurance test. The convention felt like a charity marathon without an audience, punctuated with unfunny comedy and sob stories. Tear-jerking speeches informed us that Joe Biden is a nice man. John Legend supplied the light entertainment, John Lewis the heroic archive. What a mishmash it all was.

The US is standing on the faultline of a pandemic, a deepening recession and a racial divide, but the convention still subjected us to endless speeches about how great and good the country is. Though all nations sing their own praises, the US tends to do so for longer and with far bigger production values than others.

Of course, I am biased: I've been to actual conventions and rallies in the US, and am familiar with their grandiosity, their pomp, and their insane security details. You go for the parties and the gossip that, as with Britain's party conferences, always takes place offstage: the plots, the snubs, the affairs, the desperation. On stage, everything is designed to look good on TV – a political version of Glastonbury.

During the 2008 election campaign, a friend and I were in Kentucky and were given special seats at a John McCain rally. My friend happens to be black – a fact not lost on the cameras, which homed in on McCain's "diverse" supporters. The mostly white crowd screamed "Drill, baby, drill" at the mention of Sarah Palin's name.

This year, the Democratic convention tried to make up for an absent audience with slick production and fake unity. Everyone appeared to love Biden, even those who didn't before. Bernie Sanders's speech indicated their friendship; support from rogue Republicans such as Colin Powell and Cindy McCain came as no great surprise. Bill Clinton made a speech, as did Hillary (you may have forgotten that Bernie's supporters booed Hillary in 2016). We could have done without them, to

be frank. If you're trying to capture wavering voters who feel the Democrats represent the establishment, then the Clintons are its epitome.

Overall, two messages were key. The first? Vote. This is important, beyond everything. The other, which I grew tired of, was that Biden is a good guy while Donald Trump is bad. Yet the Democratic nominee rarely goes so far as to attack the president. Not being Trump seems like Biden's main pitch.

The Democrats have always drawn celebrities. But this convention felt disjointed and random. Julia Louis-Dreyfus had too much time to tell mediocre jokes; Billie Eilish appeared. All of this was leading up to the Biden speech, by which point I was in a semi-coma after hearing so much about his church attendance and his bleeding-heart empathy.

People sat outside in cars for the drive-in rally. I switched over to watch the former Trump strategist Steve Bannon being arrested for fraud. Then Mr Empathy appeared. Biden gave a good speech, albeit a little slurry and vague. Where it was short on policy, it was big on emotions: pain, loss, purpose, compassion, decency.

As Andrew Cuomo has put it: "Donald Trump didn't create the initial division. The division created Trump. He only made it worse." This is true, but it's a concept nobody wanted to take on. Although Trump was calling the Democrats crazy socialists, there was little anyone could argue with at the convention. I doubt many people watched the full eight hours. But will the right 30-second clips be streaming? Did Biden do enough? It's not clear to me. I wanted more fight, more policies, and less Mr Nice Guy.

I'll admit it: I wanted the Democrats not to "go high", as Michelle Obama says, but to go low – to be on the attack. After four years, they should understand that Trump will go lower yet. And that can't be met with hugs and empathy. Trump and his administration have to be eviscerated. That may not be nice, but it's true.

By: Suzanne Moore

Source: The Guardian

The writer is a Guardian columnist

Israel: Emerging might with rock-solid US backing

Israel is now emerging as a mighty power due to solid support from the USA during the recent past. It seems that both the US and Israel have solidified their co-existence and both are moving with a specific agenda.

Let us discuss how the west brought Israel into existence and how it was planted in the middle of the Arab world. The conflict of Israel and Palestine was bound to surface and the heavy loss of lives it resulted into, which has continued till today.

Initially, Pakistan had support from all countries of Muslim world against this newly-emerged state, but with the passage of time many Muslim countries gradually decreased their support whereas Pakistan stood for the cause of Palestine till today. Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire, Britain seized it after World War I and in 1917, Britain raised the issue for a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, paving the way for present day Israel.

The Balfour Declaration was the effort of Britain which demanded protection for Arabs, but there was no mention of their political or national rights. When the British mandate over the lands of Palestine began in 1922, the Jewish population was only about nine percent; this number increased to nearly 27 percent by 1935 with the immigration of European Jews under British allowance.

Israel was formally established after World War II when Holocaust became one of the major reasons for Jews to have a separate homeland for themselves, who were massacred in Europe in the 1940s under the Nazi regime.

Hence, mass migration of Jews to Palestine started to happen despite the fact that in 1939, it was stated in a British white paper that it would undertake a yearly migration of only 10,000 persons to Palestine. Eventually after WWII, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for Palestine to be divided between Arabs and Jews on November 29, 1947. This finally led to the establishment of Israel.

Israel by design and planning started working hard and its second generation have taken over almost the entire print and electronic media and especially took over the financial institutions and made their way into US politics. Israelis have become so powerful that the elections in the US in terms of donations, have got high dependence on Israeli business community funding.

22-08-2020

Israel used the US in the UN and ensured that the USA had a leading role in protecting their diplomacy.

The massacre by Israel by design in Palestine in order to bring demographic changes and from 20 percent of their land they have extended to 80 percent on Palestinian land. The massacre was so bad that the Palestinian Muslims were forced to migrate by leaving their lands and it will not be wrong to say that Israel managed to not only grab the land but also develop their technology which they sold out to the world including Muslim countries under European brands. The demographic changes/reduction of Kashmir are the same model of killings of Palestinians by Israel which has been adopted by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mossad is a child of the CIA but Mossad is now more competent and lethal. The way Israel has handled Hamas and other Palestinian organisations and its penetration in the camp of Yasir Arafat actually dented Palestine. A number of attempts were made on Yasir Arafat's life and it is believed that Yasir Arafat was killed through slow poison by using his own people involved there.

I had written in my Article published under the name of "Setting the stage; Kashmir, Ladakh and World War III" in which I had stated as under: -

The world must not forget that Israel is watching as a third party and it may jump in it once all these countries are made weak like in WW-I. Let us not forget that India has already accommodated Israel to use all of its defence and hardware and the US is India's preferred defence partner. If war begins, then expect Israel to play its last role to convert it into a victory for the US. In the given situation, Pakistan as a nuclear state cannot remain isolated if this war erupts and will have no choice except to be on the side of China. It looks that there will be tremendous pressure on the Arab world from the US to recognise Israel.

In reference to relation of Pakistan, the statement by the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on October 12, 1945 is on record that which is reproduced as under:

"Every man and woman of the Muslim world will die before Jewry seizes Jerusalem. I hope the Jews will not succeed in their nefarious designs and I wish Britain and America should keep their hand off and then I will see how the Jews conquer Jerusalem. The Jews, over half a million, have already been accommodated in

Jerusalem against the wishes of the people. May I know which other country has accommodated them? If domination and exploitation are carried now, there will be no peace and end of wars.”

The above statement shows the resentment of Quaid against the illegal control of Israel on the legitimate land of Palestine.

Israel has a strong influence over the US, as there are more than 8 million Jews living in the USA. Israel with the passage of time will become stronger than America for many reasons and perhaps America also knows its capabilities and hence it is going along with Israel. The Muslim states including Pakistan need to work out on the new world order which may come on the emergence of Israel with its mighty Mossad and high technology. We need to worry because Israel is the preferred defence partner of India. It should also be worrying for us that Israel has now ingressed into our Arab neighbourhood. Now time will tell us as to how many more Arab countries will recognise it and what impact will come on the world, particularly in our region.

Let see the emergence list of August 2020, 163 of the 193 UN member states recognise Israel; thirty UN member states do not recognise Israel. These include 17 of the 22 members of the Arab League: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. A further nine are members of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Mali, Niger and Pakistan. The other countries that do not recognise Israel are Bhutan, Cuba, North Korea and Venezuela.

Muslims countries that recognise Israel:

Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognise Israel in 1949 while the relationship has been uneven since their 2010 nadir. Other Muslim countries to have recognised Israel are Jordan, Egypt, Iran and UAE.

The above status of Israel indicates how Israel has penetrated all continents.

Pakistan will have to work out the growing risk as result of the new close partnership between Israel and India. It has been reported that India has deployed Israeli defence advisors and India has already given access to American and Israeli defence experts to design the counter war strategy against China. I have shown my

22-08-2020

apprehensions that the USA and Israel may use PM Modi for their evil designs in the region and this unholy partnership will imbalance this region with RSS-trained PM Modi who has been convincing his people that he can finish the war in ten days against Pakistan. This miscommunication can lead to major conflict in the region. This mindset is likely to destroy regional peace.

The Muslim world must take note of ill motives of mighty Israel against them. They must be aware of forthcoming trap to further dilute the unity within the Muslim world. Let us pray for the guidance and blessings of Almighty Allah enabling the Muslim Umah to counter the evil designs of our enemies.

By: Senator Rehman Malik

Source: The Nation

Mega Lecture

The murder the world wrote

As fire burns Beirut, the infernal flames of isolation and genocide engulf the Palestinians for whom 'existence is an imperfect tense that never becomes present'. One of the imperial petrol pumps, carved out of the ashes of Ottoman Empire, has officially recognized the Zionist state of Israel. These tribes with colourful flags are satellites than states that help imperialism sustain its hegemonic designs. The editor-in-chief of 'Israel' Bioz Bismot, according to Tariq Ali, has described the agreement, a mere change in the status of the United Arab Emirates from decades old secret mistress to an official wife in public.

The news of UAE's affliction with Stockholm syndrome has left the remaining Arabian worldshrouded in a thick frosty blanket of mysterious quietness. It is monitoring the fallouts of this decision closely, if any. For Israel, the formal recognition is a breakthrough, which not only opens the gates of its market to several other Muslim countries but sanctifies its Lebensraum and its aggression against the Palestinians. Saudi kingdom may not join the much-expected queue immediately, but the totalitarian monarchy already under the economic pressure cannot procrastinate for long. In the great imperialist design Arabs—as Suhrawardy once pointed out—are merely numbers, abstract quantities.

The Zionist state of Israel is not only 'the symbol of the current crisis of Judaism' that 'points towards the end of its "spiritual reality"' as envisioned by Horkheimer, but is also the integral part of a soulless capitalistic order, with terror and force inbuilt in it. It is using the inbuilt force of the order against the Palestinians to turn them into numbers, for 'every number is a resource, and if it is not, it is not worth anything at all. What cannot be used (anymore) is gassed and burnt. There is no time to waste' (Adorno) and Zionists are wasting no time to erase the Palestinians from the face of the world. "This is a fatal dialectic... characteristic for our age" (Horkheimer).

Contrary to anti-Semitism, the barbaric response of Israel is not directed against the horrible conditions of life but a continuation of them. The Zionists are merely but gleefully passing on to the Palestinians what they suffered under the Nazis. Under the capitalist order all dominant powers behave in identical fashion, it is an existential dilemma of a system that inflicts destruction and Nazis were no different. The 'image of Jews can be a readymade for personalization as

wrongdoers', but social passions have the life of their own and movements of collective hatred are determined by the social relations of the society. While projecting the image of Palestinians as terrorists, the question of Jewish image has been reopened. Did the middle-class of Germany choose the Jews for their image or as Bordiga suggests capitalism suffering from economic constraints followed passively the line of least resistance? Capitalism organized Jewish holocaust as it is now organizing the death of the Palestinians.

Under the given circumstances, what options do the world community have, to kneel obsequiously in front of a brute and irrational reality or to join its ranks to fight against it? In the last two decades the question has been raised in Pakistan too, where the ruling class has always identified its interest with the hegemonic interests of imperialism with a slavish urge of conformity to its domination, especially when the Arab states have yielded already. The history of covert relation with Israel is long and tortious. During the battle against the Soviets, a journalist incidentally found the officers of Mossad in a hotel at Peshawar, assisting Pakistani generals to defeat the Godless socialism. A few days later his mutilated body was found dumped, proving that kill and dump policy is as old as the relations are.

Israel cannot be wished away, but so does the struggle of the Palestinians. If despite Holocaust Nazis could not liquidate the Jews, the Zionists cannot curb the Palestinians' resolve of freedom

Musharraf did not veil his enthusiasm to embrace Israel and to cast aside the pro-Palestinian cloak. By recognizing Israel what benefits Pakistan will have? Probably not much because the opportunity has already been seized by the Indians. The merchandise trade between the two countries reached US 5.19 billion in 2011, it marginally fell during COVID. The balance of trade is in Israel's favour. Israel, after Russia is the largest supplier of military equipment to India amounting to 9 billion \$. "In 2017 India represented 49% of Israel's arms export market... Many of those weapons had been promoted as "Combat Tested" after being used against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the world's largest open-air prison" (Whitney Webb,2019).

From space, to agriculture, to oil and gas sector, to ideology that reflects economic coercion both countries are cooperating in every field."The India-Israel relationship is also commonly being framed in terms of a natural convergence of ideas between

their ruling BJP and Likud parties (Haaretz).” Fisk notes, “Israel’s export of Zionist nationalism and neo-colonialism – and the accompanying oppression that in practice actually helps to create many of the very terrorist groups they fight against – is just as dangerous as its export of arms”. Indian coercive action in Kashmir has many similarities to Israel’s colonial occupation of Palestine.

Despite, the close economic association, an ordinary Indian is suffering the plight of the daily struggle for survival. The piles of means of destruction do not make a state safe nor does the strength of the army, if people are not prepared to save their country, its defences fall like ninepins. Poland and France in the second world war and Pakistan in 1971 were a few examples where despite powerful armies the countries surrendered meekly.

The strongest argument used in favour of Israel is the existence of the Zionist state as a reality that cannot be wished away. It is true but the counter argument suggests the existence of an apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia, once realities but now are part of the history. The bubonic plague too was once a reality so are COVID and cancer, but no one likes to suffer from these afflictions?

Israel cannot be wished away, but so does the struggle of the Palestinians. If despite Holocaust Nazis could not liquidate the Jews, the Zionists cannot curb the Palestinians’ resolve of freedom. Pakistan, in relation to the Saudi kingdom and the Gulf Sheikdoms— the constructs of imperialism— stands differently. Despite being the outcome of the ‘prophylactic decolonization’, with its natural resources and a large population necessary to create surplus value, Pakistan has all ingredients to develop into a nation state. It will have to make peace with its people especially with the minority ethnicities and to shun the temptation of exploiting the neighbouring countries like Afghanistan to have access to resources for primitive accumulation.

Barring ammunition and probably some material aid to the ruling classes Israel cannot give Pakistan anything substantial. It can help to sponsor a genocide of the ethnic minorities fighting for their dignified existence as it did in Rwanda and Myanmar and is doing in Palestine. Capitalism believes in usurping the human-created value, but not in abstract human values written in the charter of the UN. The capitalist horror is seen in Baluchistan recently, where a cold-blooded murder of an innocent student has rekindled the scenes of grisly murders of Gaza back in

memory. If judged by that standard Pakistani establishment has already qualified to recognize the apartheid state.

By: Dr. Saulat Nagi

Source: Daily Times

The writer, an Australian Pakistani has authored books on socialism and history.

Mega Lecture

From reforms to status-quo

The PTI government has completed its two years in power. The party had made tall claims before and during the election campaign to reform the system and to bring change.

However, the last two years of the PTI government were a big disappointment for all those who wanted to see serious reforms in the country. No real progress has been made on police reforms to change the 'Thana culture' in Punjab. No real initiative has been taken to reform the judicial system and criminal justice system.

The current government even failed to kick-start meaningful reforms in its first two years. Despite all the rhetoric of change and Naya Pakistan, PTI government it proved to be another government of the status quo as far as its economic policies are concerned.

Instead of implementing the reforms agenda, the PTI government chooses to pursue the traditional policies that worked well for the interests of the ruling elites. The sugar crisis, wheat crisis and petrol crisis are examples of the fact that the forces of status-quo are thriving under the PTI government.

An army of ministers has been holding daily pressers to highlight the successes of their government in the last two years. Many people want to believe what the government ministers are saying but there is one small problem – there is a big difference between the government's claims and the realities of everyday life.

The government claims that the media is free and democracy is thriving. But the reality is to the contrary. The media is under immense pressure. Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman's arrest in a NAB case is one such example. The space is shrinking for critical thinking and dissenting voices, and intolerance has increased in society.

Ordinary Pakistanis are facing rising inflation, corruption, unemployment and poverty. In fact, their living conditions are worsening and their real incomes are declining. Young people are finding it hard to get jobs. According to joint research of the ADB and ILO, 1.5 million young people have already lost their jobs and 2.2 million young people could lose their jobs in the next six months. We were told that reforms in the key areas of economy and governance would immediately be launched. We were also told that the PTI had completed the homework for reforms and experts were ready to initiate the reforms.

22-08-2020

Many PTI supporters and leading analysts, political commentators and columnists supported Prime Minister Imran Khan for the reforms agenda. The problem was that their enthusiasm was misplaced. Now they are criticising the government for not initiating reforms till now.

The problem is that serious reforms in the economic, social and administrative structures need serious thinking, policies, strategy and homework. Unfortunately, the PTI lacks all three. I pointed out some of these problems in my column published in these pages on September 7, 2018: 'A disappointing start'. This was written three weeks after the PTI government was formed. Here are a few paragraphs from that column two years ago.

"It has been a disappointing start for the PTI government as there appears to be no serious agenda for reforms beyond the symbolic, meaningless and superficial measures it has taken so far.

"This is not to question the intentions of Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government. But when the country is faced with economic, social, strategic, and regional challenges and the new government decides to devote attention to the expenditure of the PM House, protocol, and the menu for cabinet and other high-level meetings, its actions are bound to raise questions.

"I will be more than happy to see our PM living in a small house and travelling in a small car without much security protocols. But I can wait a bit longer to see that. What I want to see is a change in the repressive and exploitative socioeconomic system.

"The people want the government to concentrate on issues related to poverty; unemployment; educational and health woes; judicial, civil service and police reforms; social justice; inequality; and exploitation. They want to see a new direction in terms of policies.

"When PTI Chairman Imran Khan announced his party's programme for its first 100 days in power before the July 25 elections, it was believed that his party had done its homework to implement its agenda.... But it seems that the PTI is struggling to address economic and administrative problems.

“The formations of various taskforces and committees on a daily basis to address problems and devise solutions are a clear indication of the PTI leadership’s failure to identify key challenges before the general elections.

“The PTI leadership has repeatedly stated that it has the best team to steer the country out of crises. But most of the taskforces and ministries are headed by members of previous governments. Most of the technocrats who have been allotted government positions were part of General Musharraf’s regime while others even served in the PML-N’s previous government.

“When the PTI was in the opposition and criticised the then PML-N government, its leaders claimed that they had suitable alternative policies to fix the system. But the first two weeks of the PTI’s tenure have revealed that the party is not fully prepared to face challenges on multiple fronts. It lacks a clear strategy and direction.

“... Industrialisation is still a distant dream. Land reforms and the modernisation of agriculture are necessary to reduce rural poverty and transform rural Pakistan. The desire to reduce poverty and unemployment cannot be realised without investing in efforts to increase the productive capacity of the industrial and agricultural sectors.”

By: Khalid Bhatti

Source: The News

The writer is a freelance journalist.

Intra-Afghan dialogue

Anatomising the recent history of Afghanistan is not an uphill task. In a crudely Hobbesian sense, it has been nasty and brutish but not solitary and short. The country has remained an untameable Leviathan. It needs a break from its wretched past. Coming on the heels of the much-trumpeted US-Taliban agreement signed in February, an Afghan grand assembly of elders has approved the release of 400 Taliban prisoners, thereby paving the way for all Afghan factions to jointly devise a mechanism that could help them overpower the juggernaut of violence that has disfigured Afghanistan. This would be done through an intra-Afghan dialogue involving the Afghan government, the Taliban and various regional factions.

That this dialogue will be long, tedious and complicated cannot be overemphasised. In fact, the perceived legitimacy of the process is as important as the actual discussions it will spawn. The sponsors of the deliberative process would basically have to: 1) persuade all stakeholders that it is an authentic political platform where they can engage with each other and discuss the multifarious issues plaguing their country; 2) assure all participants that they will be treated on a par with other stakeholders and their genuine grievances will be addressed with utmost sincerity; and, 3) convince all groups that the decisions arrived at during the talks shall be implemented faithfully and the country will not be allowed to again slip into the all too familiar blood-soaked anarchy. Given the legendary capriciousness of the Afghan political intelligentsia and the diametrically opposed viewpoints of different stakeholders, this appears to be a tall order.

Be that as it may, the parleys would primarily focus on four key issues. One, what kind of system of governance should be put in place in Afghanistan? Should it be a highly centralised government like the one President Ghani heads right now or should a well-woven mosaic of decentralisation of power be crafted? What should be the quantum of autonomy granted to the subunits? Should it be a unitary system of government where political power is centralised or a federal system, whereby power is divided between the centre and different governmental subunits in accordance with a constitutional scheme?

In Afghanistan's context this is a delicate issue. Whilst smaller ethnic groups like the Tajiks and Uzbeks will push for more regional autonomy, larger ethnic groups may resist that. In a country where ethno-cultural, socio-economic and urban-rural

segregation is worse than the bad old American South, the preservation of national unity without stripping the different subunits of their right to self-govern would be nearly impossible. This would not only require formal constitutional tools that could guarantee a fair system of power sharing but also the invention of potent institutional apparatuses that could tackle political crises that might occur from time to time.

Two, the role of ideology within the political dispensation will be of immense importance. The Taliban are still adamant that Afghanistan should be a theocratic Emirate governed by the Sharia law. The matter is exceedingly sensitive because it pertains to religious beliefs and sacred conventions. It defines politics in ideological terms and describes ideology via political idioms.

Three, the protection of the rights of marginalised sections of society like women, children and minorities may also take centre stage. Enforceable constitutional and legal instruments should be available in this regard. Mainstreaming gender equality in a highly gender-sensitive society would be akin to resorting to dangerous social engineering.

Four, the dialogue may also focus on the elimination of non-state actors like ISIS fighters who can derail the process of Afghanistan's reconstruction. ISIS thugs would never allow the rise of a united and prosperous Afghanistan as this would deprive them of their most precious sanctuary. Their ability to sabotage the peace process should not be underestimated.

The intra-Afghan dialogue must succeed. If it fails, poverty, violence, social upheaval and political instability will quickly turn the country into a living hell.

By: Shariq Jamal Khan

Source: The Express Tribune

Policing a pandemic

The outbreak of the pandemic has assigned a new role to Pakistan's police. Besides crime prevention, detection and counterterrorism, police are now also expected to work in public health. In a country where the police are trained on colonial traditions, reactive to situations, strapped for resources and policing is considered a non-development affair, can it transform into a true public service?

Historically, public health remained excluded from policing in Pakistan. However, anti-polio and dengue campaigns established informal institutional linkages between health and police departments. The Epidemic Diseases Act (EDA), 1958, was an outdated law primarily based on the 1897 act. Prevention of infectious diseases was included in the Constitution's Concurrent List, which was abolished in 2010. Sindh adopted the EDA in 2014. To control the spread of Covid-19, in May 2020, the act was amended and the fine increased from Rs3,000 to maximum Rs1 million.

In KP, the Public Health (Surveillance and Response) Act was passed in 2017. It mandates an 18-member committee that lacks police representation. The committee is empowered to declare a health emergency but, realistically, except for police, no department has the enforcement capacity to deal with this. Reporting of health hazards is made mandatory, but such obligations need public empowerment. And though the law guarantees "the highest standards of human respect, dignity and privacy", owing to the weak capacity of its enforcers, such ideals are often compromised.

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To deal with Covid-19, KP promulgated an ordinance detailing restrictions on people and establishments, procedures to deal with a potentially infectious person (PIP), and trying violators summarily. It also covers issues related to education institutions, tenants/landlords, handling and burial of the deceased, and dealing with quarantine runaways.

Meanwhile, Punjab promulgated an ordinance, repealing the EDA, 1958. The law makes it binding upon individuals to share information with certified doctors regarding a PIP.

Common violations are failing to maintain social distancing and wear masks at places of worship, businesses, and public transport. In Pakistan, 9,532 violations of health guidelines were reported in a single day: 4,479 in KP; 2,445 in Punjab; 1,000 in Sindh; 818 in Balochistan; 585 in AJK; 156 in GB; and 49 in ICT.

For police, dealing with the homeless and refugees during lockdown is a daunting task. Increasing criminalisation during a pandemic did not prove effective. Globally, social distancing laws have failed to achieve results. Effective communication strategies by LEAs, volunteerism and community consent may yield more dividends. It is also important to recognise that privileged classes can observe social distancing more easily than others, and that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and compounded law enforcement.

In dealing with violations, imprisonment increases the risk of the virus spreading in overcrowded prisons, and heavy fines are also not viable given current economic constraints. Better then to focus on public education, using the four 'e's approach: engage people, explain the law and its rationale, encourage compliance, and enforce only as a last resort.

We have to strive for a balance between the right to life and right to movement. In developed countries, there is public debate on the impact of increased police powers on human liberties. In Canada, for example, the Policing the Pandemic Mapping Project found that these enhanced powers were hurting, not helping, the public. In Pakistan, owing to dysfunctional public safety commissions, such scrutiny is lacking.

During emergencies, weak police community links and dysfunctional local governments make maintaining order even more difficult. Emergency laws made without thorough deliberation, weak professional capacity, lack of additional funds and little public ownership further hinder enforcement.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of community policing. Police must adopt both inward and outward strategies. Given the lack of understanding of public health issues, police primarily focus on an outward strategy, thus policing without protective gear and procedures. Such a grave situation warrants that in dealing with arrests, investigation, accidents, protests, handling dead bodies and funerals, SOPs are drafted and implemented as per WHO guidelines. Public health approaches need to be included in the police training curriculum, and provincial

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governments need to allocate non-lapsable funds to police departments. After the pan-demic, the efficacy of such laws should be reviewed and issues arising out of its implementation studied. It is an opportunity to think about how to shift from a punitive, reactive form of policing to enforcement with consent.

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Source: DAWN

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