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Neither U.S. nor China will lead post-coronavirus order

This is the second installment of a four-part series of conversations between Yoichi Funabashi, the chairman of the nonprofit independent think tank Asia Pacific Institute (API), and Yuichi Hosoya, a professor of international politics at Keio University and senior consulting fellow for API, about how the world may look in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. Just as pandemics in the past have transformed the world order, the novel coronavirus is expected to shift the balance of power.

The initial response to the crisis has exposed the competence and vulnerabilities of the U.S., China and the European Union alike. However, it can be argued that neither of the world's two biggest economies will take a lead in the post-coronavirus world and that there is potential for a "third force."

Mask diplomacy

Funabashi: Previously, it was noted that the plague led to the loss of the Catholic Church's authority in medieval Europe and ushered in the era of modern states. With that in mind, we might ask how the world will order change after the coronavirus has passed, and who the world's guardian is to be.

The search for a leader in the post-coronavirus new order

Hosoya: A country or force that is recognized as having saved the world from the pandemic will gain an edge. However, it is impossible to predict who will attain this supremacy. There is a strong possibility that both the U.S. and China will lose out, though. When confronted with death, people will think of who can save them. But churches failed to protect people from the plague. The governments of Germany, Britain and France covered up the Spanish flu pandemic to maintain the morale of their troops during World War I, resulting in many deaths.

Political leaders who err in judgement during the current pandemic risk triggering public outrage and distrust. This sentiment could undermine a leader's or government's authority.

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China is rendering assistance to virus-hit countries through copious supplies of face masks. Italy and Spain have shown gratitude to China, but France criticized Beijing over what appeared to be mask donations in exchange for the use of Huawei Technologies' 5G network.

Through the veil of humanitarian assistance, we can see Beijing's strategic intent to gain an advantage in the post-coronavirus world. If such tactics become too obvious, they could provoke anger and distrust, rather than winning an advantageous position.

Both the U.S. and China made bad decisions in the initial response to the health crisis. Early on, the Chinese government concealed the true extent of infections and the number of deaths in the city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the disease. Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump's inability to understand the depth of the problem led to his own lapses in judgement.

Funabashi: It's certain that neither country has been able to play the global leadership role during the pandemic. Beijing's initial approach to the crisis that prioritized politics over human lives came under heavy domestic criticism. Wuhan residents high up in an apartment block reportedly shouted "Fake" and "It's all fake" as high-ranking officials from Beijing visited the city on an inspection tour. The jeering was apparently directed at local-level party executives who acted like they had handled the crisis appropriately and that life was returning to normal.

Generally, when a crisis deepens with the collapse of the medical and nursing care system, people are inclined to bank on a government that can minimize the infection spread and death toll — irrespective of the system, be it democracy or totalitarianism. China has undoubtedly contained the further spread of infections, even if it disregarded individual privacy and human rights in the process. At least, that's how it appears.

In this regard, a country should "put health before freedom," as Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha put it, when his government said it would impose a curfew in early April. If the coronavirus situation worsens, democracies could be the biggest losers.

The last bastion

Funabashi: People must be keenly aware that national governments are their last bastion and that protecting the people is the government's responsibility. In the internet era, people are constantly comparing their government's approach against others'. When a government issues requests or orders that restrict people's freedom, trust in the government is of paramount importance. Recently, many countries have asked or ordered people to stay home, exercise social distancing and close stores.

Even in the surveillance state of China, the middle class has debated China's handling of issues of life, health, food safety and environment against other countries' on the internet. But one place to worth thinking about is Europe, where case numbers and death tolls have been high.

Hosoya: People's freedoms can be weighed against human rights to control infectious diseases. Countries with powerful government control like China can respond swiftly and thoroughly to outbreaks. On the other hand, the initial response was delayed for Europe and the U.S., which emphasize human rights and are strongly resistant to constricting personal freedom.

While this has contributed to the chaos of the pandemic in Europe, the region's unique political framework — the European Union — has also played a part. One essence of the EU is "the principle of subsidiarity," which defines the scope of governance among member states and the union itself. In other words, it works as a system for them to complement each other's role in solving a given issue.

During the coronavirus crisis, this system betrayed its own problems.

The primary responsibility should have rested with individual nations, but governments in the region wavered at first. When Italy asked for help as the pandemic pushed it into a corner, neither Germany nor the EU reached out. Their rejection sowed disappointment and distrust in Italy, although Germany and the EU later reversed their course to help countries with large outbreaks and the European Commission offered an apology to Italy and Spain for the union's initial lack of preparedness.

But this uncoordinated action has shed light on Europe's problems.

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Carl Schmitt, a German political theorist during the 20th century, maintained that an emergency situation brings national sovereignty to the fore. Europe adopts a special governing structure: It is jointly ruled by national governments and the EU with each nation's authority limited to a certain extent. Because of this framework, the region had developed an aversion to overt state control before the coronavirus.

Some EU member states have forgotten to strengthen their own crisis response capabilities and learned to rely on the EU and other countries.

EU failure

Hosoya: Despite this tendency, many European countries such as Germany closed their borders without hesitation during the coronavirus outbreak. These countries initially did not have the luxury of helping others.

Countries that lacked crisis preparedness, like Italy — where the medical system soon reached a breaking point — were completely helpless against the virus. This reveals the problem with the EU's dual governing structure: The ability to act swiftly and coordinate interests among member countries fails during an emergency.

Funabashi: An opinion poll in Italy suggests that the disapproval rate for the EU has now risen to 67 percent from 47 percent in November last year.

Hosoya: The anti-EU sentiment in Italy feels similar to the anti-U.S. sentiment in Japan, in that both sentiments stem from resentment against the reality that countries' vulnerabilities force them to rely on others. Italy effectively needs to increase its financial dependence on Germany for the rebuilding effort, but the public's opposition is strong.

Similarly, the U.K. in many ways has relied on the EU. Financial support from the bloc to regions in the U.K., based on the 1998 Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland, helped stabilize the country. As the U.K. has had a markedly high coronavirus mortality rate, it looks set to endure economic difficulties in the future. It should have been its former family, the EU, to which the country turned.

However, the current Conservative administration led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson is critical of the EU, and as such the country will likely sink into a deeper economic malaise. When that happens, the only countries to which Johnson can turn are Japan and China. Whether the British people can stomach accepting

assistance from China, a country they once partly colonized, is an issue that could prove interesting.

Based on this, if the Johnson administration remains firm in its anti-EU policy, the British people, known for pragmatic thinking, may gradually drift away from their government.

Rising nationalism

Funabashi: The bottom line is that the EU, or essentially Germany, will be the mainstay. Unless Germany fulfills that role, Europe's future looks grim.

Hosoya: Given the recent situation surrounding the country, the chances that Germany will do so at its own expense are slim. This is somewhat similar to the argument that the U.S., which is tilting toward unilateralism, is unlikely to take on a leadership position in the international community.

Looking at the world order after World War I and World War II provides food for thought when considering the post-crisis new order. Post-war reflections on nationalism drove the world into cooperation.

That trend is waning 75 years later. Rather, nationalism is gaining traction in places like Germany and Japan.

While nationalism was restrained to some extent after the two wars, it could head in the opposite direction after the coronavirus. Subsequently, the international framework for cooperation will recede, possibly crippling the governing system of the EU.

Funabashi: It is worth discussing the United Nations, too. The organization played a crucial role in the postwar international order. However, one of its agencies, the World Health Organization, is now facing criticism for its handling of the coronavirus crisis. Some claim that it lacks fairness and neutrality due to strong influence from China.

Trump has reacted by issuing an order to suspend U.S. funding to the WHO, while China has pledged an additional ¥3.2 billion. Since Chinese President Xi Jinping took office in 2013, the country has strengthened its hold on the WHO and other international organizations.

China fills the top position in four of the U.N.'s 25 bodies, and strives to weaken elements of the U.S.-led postwar international order, such as the U.S.-Japan alliance. The U.N., for which China holds vested interests as a permanent member of the Security Council, is an exception. The country tries to turn the organization in its favor and will carry on with this ambition. China's strategy seems to be to hold a post in agencies related to its weaknesses, including health, human rights and intellectual property rights.

It remains to be seen if the country's playbook will serve its purpose and what exactly China's vision is, when compared to the post-war "free and open" international order.

Hosoya: During the Cold War, the intense rivalry between the the U.S. and the Soviet Union often played out at the United Nations. International organizations had served as the venue to balance the national interests of each country — but this core role has been forgotten since the Cold War ended. There has been a tendency to excessively demand justice and ethics from organizations in areas of climate change and nuclear nonproliferation, let alone the latest pandemic.

Now, China, instead of the U.S. and Soviet Union, is looking to manage the U.N. and other international organizations in ways that suit its interests.

Such an action has triggered criticism for good reasons. A country has to pay cost as necessary to earn an advantageous position and lead the international society. Cost in this context doesn't mean money. But China seems to misunderstand that paying cost equals spending, as seen in the Belt and Road initiative, China's campaign to connect Asia and Europe with infrastructure. A sensible and rational judgement as well as moral authority are always required for a country to win trust and support from the international community. Sometimes a country may have to sacrifice its national interests for the sake of justice and ethics. It took the U.S. half a century to assume the leadership role — from 1901, when Theodore Roosevelt became president, to 1945 and the creation of the U.N.

China, which is still on a learning curve, will likewise need time until it becomes an international leader.

Will China come to value common interests in the international community over its own interests and play a leadership role, or will Beijing retreat from the

international stage into itself like the U.S. has under Trump? Either scenario will have a massive impact on the world.

U.S.-China decoupling

Funabashi: One key question is whether the world's two biggest economies are heading for a further decoupling. The pandemic began amid the growing tensions of the trade war between the countries, and their responses have made clear the risks and vulnerabilities each country has.

China faces issues that threaten its trust — disregard for human rights, covering-up of inconvenient facts and data falsification — rooted in its system of autocracy.

On March 10, Xi declared China's victory over the coronavirus in Wuhan. As long as the declaration was made by the leader, the country was bound to not let a sharp increase in the number of infections and deaths happen. It had to succeed.

In such a system, it is difficult to admit and break an economic or societal deadlock. Under the Xi-led dictatorship, a political mistake is immediately attributed to the leader and will likely ignite a power struggle.

China's political system looks robust, but is actually fragile. It must be tough for the country to deliver stable and continuous leadership in the international society. The U.S. is not free from problems. Aside from Trump's utter lack of leadership capacity, the country has more serious problems like social and economic divisions, the hollowing out of the political middle caused by the fall of the country's middle class and widening income gap.

Both the U.S. and China have internal problems. It will be a challenge for the two nations to put bilateral relations back on course for stability and jointly lead the formation of the post-pandemic order.

Universal values

Hosoya: After World War II, the globe was polarized by the U.S. and Soviet Union because the universal ideals and values presented by the two powers became the subject of adoration and respect for many people, not simply because they had a military or economic edge.

Now, people around the world may not have a sense of respect for the U.S., where the gap between the rich and the poor is stretched to the extreme, nor for China, where a one-party dictatorship suppresses freedom.

But at the same time, the U.S. and China are not expected to enter a “honeymoon” period, nor face an all-out confrontation. That is a defining difference from relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The U.S. needs China, and vice versa.

It is possible that a third force — neither the U.S. nor China — holds the key to the new post-pandemic order. The combination of Japan and the EU is the most likely possibility.

The two solidified their ties with an economic partnership agreement that went into effect in February, 2019. Another likelihood is the combination of the U.S., China, the EU and Japan. The first likely future development is that a third force maintains close cooperation with the U.S., mainly in the Group of Seven industrialized nations and security alliances. The second is that the third force stays away from Trump’s hostility to international organizations and moves closer to China.

Mismatched will

Funabashi: During the recent health crisis, I felt that tension between the U.S. and China on an emotional level is riskier than economic tension. That is the fear that racial discrimination fuels distrust and rejection of China.

Such notions can be traced back to Social Darwinism, a theory that humans are subject to the same laws of natural selection British naturalist Charles Darwin had proposed for plants and animals, which became popular in the 1880s.

This theory generated the concept of eugenics, which contributed to the Nazi massacre of Jews.

Another thing which makes it difficult for the U.S. and China to join hands to create the new post-coronavirus order is a mismatch between will and capacity. The U.K. had the will to build a world order after World War I, but it lacked the capacity to match. The U.S. — which had the capacity — lacked the will.

After World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union which had the will and capacity became superpowers.

After COVID-19, the U.S. will likely retain the capacity but unilateralism in the country will persist for a long time. Due to its focus on post-coronavirus economic reconstruction, the U.S.'s interest in the world and distribution of resources to the world will taper off. For a while, the country will only be a weak-willed leader.

China, for its part, will push for promoting the advantage of its model to the international society including the success of containing the infections through its Orwellian totalitarian surveillance. In the post-coronavirus order, China might also consider establishing the leadership by filling the void left by the U.S., such as when the country pulls itself out of the WHO.

By: Yoichi Funabashi

Source: The Japan Times

Mega Lecture

The danger is now clear: Trump is destroying democracy in broad daylight

This is not a normal election. I don't say that because it is now clear that, against some stiff competition, Donald Trump is the most repellent individual ever to have sought, let alone won, the presidency of the United States. The latest proof comes in a quadruple-sourced account of Trump describing US troops who died for their country as "losers" and "suckers", and demanding that a military parade exclude wounded veterans, lest spectators glimpse an amputee. "Nobody wants to see that," he said.

There was a time when the Atlantic's jaw-dropping report, later corroborated "in its entirety" by the Associated Press, would have proved terminal for a politician in a country where respect for the military supposedly has the status of a religious obligation. But that time is long past. It ended in 2015 when Trump branded John McCain – who had spent more than five years in a Hanoi cell as a prisoner of war – a "loser", though of course now Trump swears blind that he never said any such thing, despite the existence of video showing him saying exactly that.

In a normal election, you'd be running the numbers on the harm this would do to Trump among his avowedly patriotic base. But wiser heads have learned to give up on such calculations. Trump's supporters will write this off as more fake news, and stick with their man even as he tramples on everything they claim to hold dear. Like he always said, he could shoot people on Fifth Avenue and they'd still vote for him.

Which is why it will similarly make no difference that this week he spouted conspiracist garbage about Joe Biden being controlled by people "in the dark shadows", or reheated a Facebook-spread fantasy about black-clad looters boarding planes to fly around the country causing trouble – think of it as RiotAir – offering no evidence. Of course that won't move the needle.

Remember, this is a country where close to 200,000 people are dead thanks to a pandemic that Trump refused to admit was happening, and for which his proposed remedy was self-injected bleach. The US economy lies in tatters, racked by mass unemployment. And yet, despite that record of lethal failure, this inadequate, malignant man still has the support of 42% of the American people.

That fact alone makes this an abnormal election. But that's not the exceptional circumstance I have in mind. Rather, it is that the critical contest on 3 November is not so much between Democrat and Republican as between democrat and anti-democrat. It is that nothing less than the US's standing as a democracy is at stake.

Consider the evidence. This week, the president urged his supporters to vote twice. It wasn't a joke. It was a message delivered in earnest. In a series of Twitter messages that the social media company hid from view for violating its rules on "civic and election integrity", Trump told his followers to vote early by mail-in ballot and then turn up in person on election day to vote again. Here was the self-styled law-and-order candidate urging Americans to break the law.

He claimed he only wanted people to test the robustness of the system – because if the system worked, then his supporters shouldn't be allowed to cast that second ballot – but that's the logic of the bank robber who insists he's only emptying the safe to help the bank improve its security. Besides, there's a pattern here.

Little more than a month ago, Trump suggested that, since postal voting – set to increase massively because of the pandemic – was bound to lead to "the most INACCURATE & FRAUDULENT election in history", it would be best to delay the election, even though the constitution bars him from making such a move. At his convention last month, he urged the crowd, who had been chanting for "four more years" to call instead for "12 more years", even though that too would violate the constitution. Most troubling, he has repeatedly refused to say whether he will accept defeat and leave office if that's what the voters decide.

This is what his now-constant attacks on mail-in voting are about: Trump is preparing the ground to challenge the electorate's verdict, arguing that the result cannot be trusted because postal votes shouldn't count. He has seen the data that shows mail-in voters are more likely to lean towards Biden, and so wants to be able to argue, come 4 November, that tens of millions of postal votes should be chucked out – leaving only the votes cast on election day, from which Trump reckons he could achieve a narrow victory.

That's why he installed a Republican donor as head of the US Postal Service, a man who has set about gutting the service's ability to process mail-in ballots in time. And that's why he's starving the post office of cash. This is not guesswork, or the analysis of hostile commentators. Trump has admitted as much. Explaining why he

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was seeking to cut off two sources of postal service revenue, he said: “If they don’t get those two items, that means you can’t have universal mail-in voting because they’re not equipped to have it.” With Trump, he always says the quiet part out loud.

Given that the polls suggest he cannot win a straight fight, Trump’s next best scenario is a cloud of confusion and doubt hanging over the November result. Sackfuls of uncounted ballots stuck in postal depots; his base crying fraud, groundlessly suggesting that the mail-in votes are forgeries: this is the context in which he reckons he could argue that the election was disputed and therefore there was no good reason for him to leave office.

And who would stop him? Note that the attorney general, William Barr, supposedly the most senior law enforcement officer in the land, this week refused to say whether voting twice was against the law. Trump’s enablers have come this far. Why would they change course now?

The danger is clear, even before you reflect on the decades-old Republican effort to suppress the vote, especially the Black vote – an effort whose motive Trump brazenly disclosed when he told Fox News that if voting was easier and turnout went up, “you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again”. Not for nothing did Barack Obama, a man not prone to hyperbole, warn last month that Trump is willing to “tear our democracy down if that’s what it takes to win”.

Consider all that Trump has been willing to do already. Imagine what he would do if he received the mandate of re-election. Except there’s no need to imagine it. Trump’s contempt for democracy is in plain sight.

By: Jonathan Freedland

Source: The Guardian

The writer is a Guardian columnist

Deepening crisis in India

According to the official data released on August 31, the Indian economy has shrunk 23.9 percent in the second quarter ended June 30 (April-June). This is the biggest decline in the growth rate of one of the largest economies in the world, the sharpest contraction in nearly 40 years.

The Indian economic crisis has deepened as recovery will take longer than was earlier expected. Financial services – the biggest component of India's dominant services sector has shrunk 5.3 percent. Trade, hotels, transport and communication saw a 47 percent contraction. Manufacturing shrank 39.3 percent, while construction took a 50.3 percent hit. Mining output struggled at 23.3 percent, and electricity and gas dipped by 7 percent. Agriculture is the only sector which posted growth of 3.4 percent.

According to India's retail association, sales of non-essential items – such as clothes, electronics, furniture – fell by 80 percent in May. The sales of essential goods such as groceries and medicines have dipped by 40 percent.

Private consumption has been the main driver of India's growth, contributing about 60 percent to GDP, and its fall is dragging economic growth further down. The declining incomes are decreasing the demand and consumption.

The estimates for GDP growth in 2020 already painted a bleak picture. The World Bank had projected a 3.2 percent contraction, while the International Monetary Fund pegged it at 4.5 percent and the Asian Development Bank at 4 percent. Some economists are predicting contraction up to 10 percent in FY 2020-21. It will be the first full year contraction since 1980. The long period of high economic growth rate has come to an abrupt end.

The current surge in coronavirus cases will make the matters worst. A record number of 83,833 cases was reported on Sep 2, the highest single-day jump in Covid-19 infections in the country since the beginning of the pandemic. The total number of infections now stands at 3.85 million. In a span of 24 hours, 1,043 deaths were registered, taking the total number of fatalities to 67,376.

The Modi government is facing multiple crises at the moment. The public health crisis as Covid-19 infections are getting out of control on the one hand and there is

a deepening economic crisis on the other. The Modi government has so far failed on both fronts.

The Indian people are facing hardships and suffering miseries as the result of both these crises. India's working class is the real victim of the failure of the Modi government on both the economic and coronavirus fronts. The people are suffering because consumer spending, private investments, industrial production and exports have collapsed. Unemployment and poverty are rising. Real incomes and living conditions are also falling.

Wage incomes were already declining even when the economy was growing at a fast pace. Real income started to fall under the Modi government before the economic crisis hit India.

A study titled 'How Are Indian Households coping Under the Covid-19 Lockdown? 8 Key Findings' was carried out by experts at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Chicago and the Mumbai-based Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE).

This study has analysed the economic impacts of the lockdown in India. The study has shown that incomes have fallen, and poverty and unemployment have risen. Poor and working class people need assistance from the government to survive.

Nearly 84 percent of Indian households have been seeing a decrease in their income since the lockdown began. Nearly a third of all households will not be able to survive beyond a week without additional assistance. The unemployment rate in the country had crossed 27 percent in early May, up nearly four-fold from levels in January-February.

Even before the pandemic struck, Asia's third-largest economy was in the midst of a slowdown as a crisis in the shadow bank sector hurt new loans and took a toll on consumption, which accounts for some 60 percent of India's GDP. The lockdown to contain the pandemic brought activity to a virtual halt as businesses shut down and millions of workers fled the cities for their rural homes.

The gloomy outlook puts pressure on the Modi government to deliver more stimulus packages, but there's limited room to act. The first stimulus package failed to stop the economic decline and pick up recovery. The government is facing a

budget deficit of more than 7 percent of GDP this fiscal year, more than double its original target.

Many Indian economists believe that the Indian economy is headed towards a serious crisis of the kind that Indians have never seen since 1979. Earlier, economists were talking about a possible recession in the economy. Now they are predicting something worse than a recession. They are talking about a possible depression.

India has never faced a sustained long-term downturn in economic activity since its independence in 1947. But there is now every possibility that India is looking at a 'depression' for the first time in its history, a possibility flagged by several economists.

Veteran Indian economist Arun Kumar has predicted that "India would be the first country in modern history to face a depression. It would take at least three to four years to emerge out of it."

Another economist Pronab Sen, former chief statistician of India, in his detailed analysis of economic situation showed that India's economy will contract not just this year but also in 2021-22.

The study says India's absolute GDP is likely to struggle to even come back to the 2019-20 level by 2023-24, which is the last year of the Modi government's current term.

Pronab Sen also shares Arun Kumar's thoughts, and estimates that "as things stand, and the government retains the 2020-21 expenditure budget for 2021-22 as well, it is likely that 2021-22 will witness a GDP growth rate of -8.8 percent. This is a frightening thought since it means that the country could experience a full-blown depression – the first in our history as an independent nation."

But official economists think otherwise. For them, the worst is over and recovery will start soon. However, they seem overoptimistic or shortsighted. This is not an ordinary crisis. The current crisis has exposed the weaknesses of the neoliberal economic model, which has failed. And the people of India are paying a heavy price for this failure.

Despite having one of the highest economic growth rates for nearly one and a half decades, India failed to reduce poverty and inequality. In fact India becomes one of the most unequal countries in the world.

The latest Oxfam report has revealed that the 63 richest Indian billionaires have more wealth than the total national budget of India. The total national budget was Rs2,784,200 crore (\$391.53 billion) in 2019.

According to an Oxfam report, India's richest one percent hold more than four-times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70 percent of the country's population while the total wealth of all Indian billionaires is more than the full-year budget.

The neoliberal economic model and free market economic policies have helped the rich amass huge piles of wealth. The richest one percent in India now owns more assets and means of productions than ever before.

By: Khalid Bhatti

Source: The News

US attempt to create 'new order' aimed at maintaining hegemony

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the victory of World War II and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (UN). It's a time of great celebration, but the world is shrouded in the shadow of a "new cold war," and people are increasingly worried that a "hot war" between major powers might break out. Particularly, for the Chinese who have enjoyed peace for the past few decades, preventing war is of utmost significance.

The wars of aggression launched by Nazi Germany, imperialist Japan, and other fascist political forces have brought great suffering to people all over the world, including Chinese. The casualties in China and the former Soviet Union exceeded 35 million and 27 million respectively. The destruction of property, human life and dignity by WWII cannot be forgotten.

Seventy-five years ago, all parties jointly established the UN and formulated the UN Charter, which is the cornerstone of the modern international order. According to the UN Charter, the purpose of establishing the UN is to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."

Undoubtedly, the ideal international order is different from the one in reality. The power possessed by each country, especially its economic and military power, still shapes international relations to a large extent. The rules made by the US, the most powerful country in the world, are taken as international rules. The "international order" that some Americans are talking about actually refers to the "club" formed by Western liberal democracies, or the security structure supported by the alliance system of the US and NATO.

This "international order" is fundamentally aimed at maintaining the hegemony of the US, which is the core idea of the "hegemonic stability theory" that some American scholars advocate. However, this approach not only ignores the diversity of other countries' political and cultural traditions, but may also easily lead to tragedies such as the Iraq War.

It should be noted that in the past few decades, China, India, and most developing countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America have failed to effectively participate in the formulation of international rules. Even so, China still strives to

integrate into the international system and become the defender of the existing international order.

Obviously, China's development in the past few decades has benefited from the current international order, so there is no need for China to overthrow it. It is precisely the US under the Trump administration that is striving to be a revisionist hegemon. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo once acknowledged that in order to deal with the so-called "great power competition," Washington was trying to build a new international order. Pompeo once clamored, "America intends to lead - now and always."

Trump severely criticized globalization and multilateralism on occasions like the UN General Assembly. The Trump administration has humiliated the UN, the WHO and their senior officials, which is unprecedented. In order to maintain its maritime hegemony, the US has not accepted the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Since Trump became president, the US has withdrawn from more than a dozen international treaties, including the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear deal, and almost successfully paralyzed the WTO. The Trump administration's disruption of the existing international order has drawn criticism both at home and abroad.

More importantly, the "ideological civil war" in the US has intensified. White supremacy, hate crimes, and the spread of violence are eroding the country's liberal democratic system. It is therefore absurd that Pompeo is trying to use ideological factors to provoke conflicts between the world and China, and establish a new international order that opposes and excludes China.

Fortunately, more and more people have realized that the Trump administration and some American hawks pose a serious threat to the international order, and the international system with the UN at its core needs to be more effectively maintained. According to Stewart Patrick, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, the future of the world order is not preordained.

"The arc of history will depend heavily on whether the post-coronavirus US embraces constructive internationalism or clings to its current, disastrous course under President Donald Trump."

By: Zhao Minghao

Source: Global Times

The author is a senior research fellow at Charhar Institute and an adjunct fellow at Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China.

Mega Lecture

The Ummah is dead

The Ottoman-German Alliance's defeat in WW1 and the consequent abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate caused the then Muslim Ummah to lose its centre of gravity, its cohesiveness and direction. The emergence of Israel in Palestine, consequent to the Balfour Declaration, further compounded its challenges.

US policy in the Greater Middle East Region (GMER) aimed at preserving Israel as the sole, unchallenged hegemonic power of the region. To that end it isolated, divided, weakened and eliminated all possible threats to Israel's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The US used its military, economic and diplomatic power to coerce the Arabs into eventually forsaking the Palestinians and accepting Israel as a fait accompli. Simultaneously, it abetted Israel's annexation of Palestinian and Arab lands in the Sinai Desert, on the West Bank, the Golan Heights and in Jerusalem.

The US' two-pronged approach was successful. One, in a series of wars between Israel and its neighbours it successfully destroyed whatever little military, economic, political and/or diplomatic clout the Muslim states in the GMER ever had. Two, it engineered the division of the Ummah on political, ethnic and sectarian lines. Practically, the Persian Gulf now divides the GMER into Arab and non-Arab and Sunni and Shiite regions. This division obviates all joint or synergised existentialist threats to Israel. The Abraham Accord between the UAE and Israel is the latest step in that direction.

This division of the Ummah has been epitomised by the gradual albeit emphatic denigration of the two prime issues which could have been the rallying points to unite the Muslim Ummah—Palestine and Kashmir.

The gradual diminution of the Palestine issue from a global to a non-descript terrorism issue between Israel and Hamas-Hezbollah only, is a damning indictment of the pathetic incompetence and indifference of the Muslim Ummah and the shrewdness of the US-Israel Combine. A furtherance of the Abraham Accord will isolate the Palestinians even more. Bereft of Arab support they will be subsumed into Israel. The fanciful two-state solution will remain in the air. However, regardless of how many Arab states sign up for the Abraham Accord or similar agreements, there will be no peace in the GMER till the Palestinians get their own state/homeland.

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Similarly, despite Pakistan's otherwise successful attempts at internationalising the Kashmir issue at the UN/UNSC and other international fora and major capitals of the world, it has singularly failed to get the OIC to back its efforts. The Arabs have not been too forthcoming on this issue. They have enormous economic interests in India and are averse to doing anything that may jeopardise their investments there. However inexplicably, why is the leverage only being exercised by India or in its favour by the Arabs? Why cannot the Arabs conversely use their economic investments in India, its expatriate workers, the remittances they send back home in the billions of dollars as leverage to support Muslim causes like the Kashmiris Right to Self Determination? Is it then a matter of choice and preference? Or is it a part of the larger US design to prop India up for its eventual (sacrificial!) showdown with China? Arab states do not see Kashmir as an issue of the Ummah but a bilateral one between India and Pakistan. Pakistan disagrees. They have thus belittled the Kashmir issue (a la Palestine), the Kashmiris epic struggle and callously denied Pakistan the opportunity to use the OIC's platform to project what is so obviously a very sensitive issue for it and the Ummah!

Thus, the two cardinal issues that beset the Muslim Ummah now stand demeaned, debased, discredited and denigrated courtesy the divisive policies of the Arabs. This has now become a case of diverging/clashing interests between the Arabs and the rest of the Ummah. The split is already there, all it needs is an event to practically validate it. It is but a function of time now. The more the Arabs incline towards the US-Israeli-India Combine that much more the non-Arab part of the Ummah will move away from them and that much more will the Ummah become divided, weakened and prone to destruction, piecemeal. If the Arab subjugation to the US-Israeli-India Combine continues, then inevitably, the Ummah will resist going into involuntary servitude too. The Ummah's leadership will consequently shift away from them to the non-Arabs. This will be an (un)intended albeit natural outcome of the Ummah's division achieved by the US-Israeli-India Combine.

The first warning signs of a change in leadership came about when Turkey, Malaysia, Iran and Pakistan decided to get together at Kuala Lumpur. Pakistan was unceremoniously coerced by the KSA and the UAE to abstain— much to its chagrin and obvious humiliation. It hurt Pakistani sensibilities massively and would have affected the unfettered goodwill these Arabs enjoy in Pakistan, equally. This chasm between the Arabs and Pakistan—the only substantial nuclear and military power

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of the Muslim Ummah—bodes ill for both. And who does it benefit? Together they could still form a very potent and formidable team.

As the Ummah splits up the Arabs will find themselves isolated and reduced to the ranks of mere appeasing lackeys and sidekicks of the US-Israel-India Combine. They will thereafter be used (US' Offshore Balancing strategy) to threaten and neutralise Iran and ominously even venture beyond. Eastwards?

The Arabs must re-assess the emerging strategic environment, recognise the deep-rooted machinations of the US-Israel-India Combine and sift friend from foe. They must decide and choose sagaciously. The Ummah's leadership cannot be selective in its approach. It has to be more pragmatic, large hearted, all-encompassing and accommodating. Leadership of the Ummah is neither an ordained nor a sacrosanct right and is clearly at stake here. It must become more sensitive to the interests and concerns of the rest of the Ummah; lest it be left with next to nothing to lead!

It took close to a century for the West to destroy the Caliphate and subsequently the Ummah. Ironically, the Muslims themselves have hastened the process!

By: Imran Malik

Source: The Nation

Map disputes

A really independent state should strive, first and foremost, to build up the state's institutions and promote the welfare of its people. It must not allow itself to be trapped in disputes with the neighbours. If they do arise, it should strive to settle them, not aggravate them. To do so otherwise would be to stoke tensions and create unnecessary rivalries.

But the experience in South Asia in this respect has been saddening. Some disputes are inescapable. But instead of trying resolutely to resolve them, they are used for political mobilisation to buttress the party in power by all parties concerned.

In this exercise, maps come in handy, both in confrontation with the foreign adversary and in domestic politics. This is a sham pursuit.

In law, maps are worthless as proof of title to territory. They are not documents of title at all.

The observations and rulings of the International Court of Justice are helpful, and this writer has quoted them earlier in other publications as well. The case of the 11th-century Preah Vihear Temple, as well as that of frontiers in Africa, bear repeating. The temple is at the centre of a dispute between Cambodia and Thailand, and competing territorial claims and nationalist sentiments have seen clashes between the two countries, even after the ICJ ruling in the 1960s. Cambodia won its case on the Preah Vihear Temple because Thailand had, "by its conduct, accepted a crucial map though in its inception and at the moment of its production, it [the map] had no binding character".

In the 1980s, the ICJ ruled on the case of the border dispute between Burkina Faso and Mali. It stated: "Whether in frontier delimitations or in international territorial conflicts, maps merely constitute information which varies in accuracy from case to case; of themselves, and by virtue solely of their existence, they cannot constitute a territorial title, that is, a document endowed by international law with intrinsic legal force for the purpose of establishing territorial rights.

"Of course, in some cases, maps may acquire such legal force, but where this is so, the legal force does not arise solely from their intrinsic merits; it is because such maps fall into the category of physical expressions of the will of the State or States concerned.

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“This is the case, for example, when maps are annexed to an official text of which they form an integral part. Except in this clearly defined case, maps are only the extrinsic evidence of varying reliability or unreliability which may be used, along with other evidence of a circumstantial kind, to establish or reconstitute the real facts.”

Crucially, it noted that “... except when maps are in the category of a physical expression of the will of the state, they cannot in themselves alone be treated as evidence of a frontier since, in that event they would form an irrebuttable presumption, tantamount, in fact to legal title”.

Indian Customs routinely stamp these words on maps in foreign journals: “The external boundaries of India as depicted are neither accurate nor authentic.” The Economist of London has regularly put this comic device to ridicule. It provides the key words to the full exposure of the map on the internet. India has enacted two statutes to ensure legal bans on maps that do not toe the official line.

According to India’s Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1961, the state can imprison anyone who “questions” the territorial integrity of India whether by “words,” spoken or written, or by visual representation” or “by signs”. The Criminal Law (Amending) Act, 1990 states: “Whoever publishes a map of India, which is not in conformity with maps of India as published by the Survey of India, shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both.”

The 1961 law requires proof that the map’s publication is “likely to be prejudicial to the interests of the safety and security of India”. The 1990 act dispenses with such niceties.

It is hard to see how any map, or for that matter any writing, can upset a country’s sovereignty. That surely depends on the facts of history and the country’s military strength. The effect of the government’s stance is to stifle free speech on sensitive issues such as Kashmir and the boundary question. Citizens have the right to say that Kashmir is a disputed region and that the northern boundary is wrongly depicted in official maps. Laws that do not uphold this right are unconstitutional.

The expression ‘cartographic aggression’ is puerile. Maps have some evidentiary value only if published before the dispute arose.

After its statutory rape of Kashmir on Aug 5, 2019, India published a new map on Nov 3, 2019, depicting the result of that statutory crime. Both acts violate the Shimla Pact which says, "Neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation."

By: A.G. Noorani

Source: DAWN

The writer is an author and a lawyer.

Mega Lecture

Belarus — another colour revolution?

It was amusing to watch Alexander Lukashenko hovering on top of peaceful protestors in his helicopter, brandishing an assault rifle on his shoulder. Lukashenko has been on the throne of Belarus for 26 years like a king, leading to oppression of the opposition and corruption. Running for the sixth time, when the state-TV announced that he had won 80.23% of the votes, supporters of opposition leader Tsikhanouskaya headed to the streets in all major cities — accusing Lukashenko of electoral fraud.

But more than corruption or authoritarianism, Lukashenko has another evil — his is a pro-Russian government in the post-Soviet space — the space Europe and the United States have ardently been trying to regain since the end of the Cold War. In their war-by-all-means, the West has been backing regime change in this space by helping organising several ‘colour revolutions’ against pro-Russian rulers.

Starting from the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, there have been around 12 colour revolutions in post-Soviet space; like the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia (2000), Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004 and 2014), Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005), and their sequels don’t seem to be ending. Conscious of these interventions, Russia has been increasingly vocal about its concerns over Western-backed popular agitations, that have been a new psyop phenomenon, for which Russia was finding no means to counter except by traditional force-based measures.

In 2015, Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov stated that he sees colour revolutions as a form of warfare and that it is necessary to seek ways to use the military in response. Putin signed the new National Security Strategy in 2015, in which the official view of “foreign-sponsored” anti-regime protests in pro-Russian states as non-military warfare by the West was formalised. And that in this pretext, Russia would be justified to use “military intervention abroad in what others would see as non-military crises.”

It is not as if this type of intervention is not well-documented. Regarding the 2004 Chestnut Revolution in Ukraine, The Guardian’s Ian Traynor wrote of direct US intervention in the process: “The Democratic party’s National Democratic Institute, the Republican party’s International Republican Institute, the US state department

and USAid are the main agencies involved in these grassroots campaigns as well as the Freedom House NGO and billionaire George Soros's open society institute. US pollsters and professional consultants are hired to organise focus groups and use psephological data to plot strategy." Only, it doesn't seem to be an intervention, rather they planned and executed the whole thing from the beginning.

The same techniques were tried in Belarus in 2005, where the US ambassador in Minsk, Michael Kozak, organised an identical campaign that failed. This time the protests that started well before the elections have been ongoing for over three months. A few weeks back, Putin told Angela Merkel that the crisis in Belarus could escalate if "external actors tried to meddle in the republic's internal affairs" and that such interference was "unacceptable". In response, French President Macron warned against any aggressive Russian intervention in Belarus, and that relations between the EU and Russia were at stake.

The question here is not if a corrupt authoritarianism should go or not. It should certainly. But the question here is: can states allow foreign covert machineries to infiltrate in their social fabric and induce a mass change or revolution that does not belong to the people? Does democracy, which is the will and choice of the people, allow that the will and choice of the people be 'conditioned' by 'another people'? Does democracy allow that the 'right definition' of democracy for a people be imported from abroad, because this people are incapable of thinking for themselves?

From using social media to organise student movements to unifying the opposition and from exit-poll strategies to systematic and planned protests — if all this is planned, funded and executed by outside entities, then either we have to give up our understanding of what democracy and nation states are or we have to stand up for the indigenous collective conscience of a people and acknowledge their right to live their own experience.

Western forces have been interfering in state after state since the Cold War in the name of bringing democracy and have been direly failing. We have seen this from the Philippines to Macedonia and from Afghanistan to Libya and we have seen persistent corruption and decades of devastating warfare. Experts have even defined the 2013 Shahbag Protests of Bangladesh and the 2007 Lawyers'

Movement of Pakistan as colour revolutions too, as the same layout and factors can be traced in them as used in other colour revolutions.

Lukashenko has been greedy for power, yet he has invested heavily in Belarus' industrial capacity and resisted wide-scale privatisation of its core economic industries such as manufacturing, specialist engineering equipment, agricultural machinery and the country has attained the highest standard of living out of all post-Soviet states. Yet the will of the people that is owned indigenously by the people is their supreme democratic right.

The question is: can the will of a people be exported and imposed upon them from a foreign land? How does this bode in democratic self-determination?

By: Aneela Shahzad

Source: The Express Tribune

Mega Lecture

Veterans doubt Gupkar Declaration's sincerity

On 4 August 2019, a group of politicians in Srinagar issued a statement, now known as the "Gupkar Declaration", to defend the "identity, autonomy and special status of Jammu & Kashmir against all attacks and onslaughts whatsoever". Within 24 hours, the Government of India responded by stripping the State of this identity and status and, additionally, broke it into two parts. A year later, on August 22, 2020, the pro-India leadership in Srinagar issued "Gupkar Declaration", stating that they "are committed to strive for the restoration of Articles 370 and 35A, the Constitution of J&K and the restoration of the State."

The question arises that in the ensuing period Illegally Indian Occupied Kashmir (IIOK) has been shut down in a massive lockdown, its people suffered tremendously but the Kashmiri leadership took a year to issue the "Gupkar Declaration".

The Declaration states: "The series of measures undertaken on 5th August 2019 were grossly unconstitutional." So much for small mercies that it took a year for the indigenous Kashmiri leadership to reach this conclusion. Yet in their myopic vision, they remain oblivious to the fact that the "Gupkar Declaration" fails to mention that these measures also contravene the UN Security Council resolutions #122 and #126 adopted on January 24, 1957, and December 2, 1957, respectively. These resolutions prohibit any unilateral action targeted at changing the disputed nature of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Naively, some western capitals perceive the Kashmir dispute as a problem between Srinagar and New Delhi, which can be solved by improving their relations. They feel that Pakistan, the stumbling block, can be mollified easily.

Veteran Kashmiri freedom fighter Ghulam Nabi Fai has pointed out that UN Security Council Resolution # 122 "reaffirms the affirmation of its resolution 91 (1951) and declares that the convening of a constituent assembly as recommended by the General council of the 'All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference' and any action that assembly may have taken or might attempt to take to determine the future shape and affiliation of the entire State or any part thereof, or any action by the parties concerned in support of any such action by the assembly, would not constitute a disposition of the State in accordance with the above principle."

The eloquent Kashmiri leader observes that leaving aside linguistic and strategic maneuvering, the “Gupkar Declaration” leads to one conclusion: that autonomy is the only option. But the present situation in Kashmir has also made it abundantly clear that the autonomy is unjust, untenable and not acceptable to the people of Kashmir. Aazadi, the only catch phrase of resistance on the streets of Kashmir, does not mean autonomy but right to self-determination.

Renowned human rights activist Arundhati Roy’s responded to a question on October 3, 2019, “what do the people of Kashmir want?”: “I don’t think that they could have been clearer. They’ve been saying it for 70 years. They’ve been saying it loudly. They’ve been saying it with their blood since 1990. Of course, it’s self-determination. You know, of course, it’s self-determination.”

The Kashmiri veterans believe that some well-wishers of Kashmir may have endorsed the “Gupkar Declaration” out of ignorance to the fact that the belated declaration disregards the Kashmiri’s inalienable right to self-determination. There is also apprehension that owing to external pressures, Pakistan may be constrained to dilute its stand on Kashmir.

Feeling the pulse of the Occident, Dr. Fai opines that two ideas are being discussed: firstly, turning the Line of Control (LoC) into a permanent international border and secondly, autonomy or self-governance for Kashmir within the Indian Union. The Kashmiri veterans believe that the Kashmiris had revolted in 1989 against the status quo and will never accept the status quo as a settlement.

Naively, some western capitals perceive the Kashmir dispute as a problem between Srinagar and New Delhi, which can be solved by improving their relations. They feel that Pakistan, the stumbling block, can be mollified easily. Many western capitals are debating the efficacy of the adoption of the Musharraf formula to resolve the Kashmir dispute. Dr. Fai considers the Musharraf formula to have been crafted to confuse the whole issue and, in the bargain, to throw dust in the eyes of world powers.

The erudite scholar draws the conclusion that the world powers remain oblivious to the fact that ‘Restoration of Article 370,’ or ‘self-governance,’ or ‘Musharraf’s formula,’ or ‘Autonomy’ is a clear fallacy. This would be tantamount to relying on a provision of the Indian Constitution. All Constitutions of the world are subject to amendments and Indian Constitution is no exception. If not now, in the foreseeable

future, like India did on August 5, 2019, this provision can be deleted from the Constitution and the move will not even need a debate in the Indian Parliament.

The powers that be must take cognizance of the fact that Kashmiris have had the experience of a limited autonomy, which was first practiced under a personal understanding between Nehru, then the prime minister of India and Sheikh Abdullah, then the prime minister of Jammu & Kashmir and later provided for by Section 370 of the Indian Constitution. It was eroded and eventually whittled away by the forces of circumstances.

This leads us to the conclusion that there is only one solution to the Kashmir imbroglio and achieving lasting peace; executing the UN Security Council Resolutions on Kashmir and granting the people of Kashmir the right of self-determination. Disregarding the wishes of the people or following the whims of New Delhi or the redundant Kashmiri leaders will only lead to more bloodshed.

By: S M Hali

Source: Daily Times

The writer is a retired Group Captain of PAF. He is a columnist, analyst and TV talk show host, who has authored six books on current affairs, including three on China