**In search of a narrative**

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The secret of success in the foreign policy realm lies in sincere endeavours of rediscovering the distinction between hope and reality. A better sense of destination guides policymakers to churn out viable policies while quietly avoiding the illusionary paradise of future predicting pundits. Policy contours shaped out of impulse or born from extreme desire usually produce unexpected and undesirable results. The sea of hope must rest on the ever-evolving shores of realpolitik if a nation actually wishes to slam the door in the face of disappointments. It is difficult to believe that certain states still feel compelled to engage in blame games rather than putting their character, deeds and belief systems in front of a mirror.

Hopes are cautiously being attached with 77-year-old US President-elect Joe Biden and his tried, tested and trusted team in addressing almost every issue facing the planet Earth. Predictions are afloat of a changed America after the Trump Administration’s nightmarish tenure of despondency ended in an unprecedented ‘Made in USA’ embarrassment. Unfortunately, President Biden has started his first days of work in office with a pink face rather than his usual jovial self. Engulfed by an unending pandemic, his administration’s first few priorities perhaps would be to heal the wounds of his country’s pride; inoculate the entire American nation with the ‘right’ Covid-19 vaccine; inculcate confidence in the American people and the world that the Frankenstein is captured and here opens up an era of hope; prioritise implementation of his election promises especially those he made to his own countrymen; reassure the world of Washington’s firm belief in democratic norms, morality, fair play and rule of law and last but not least, that the David of Shame has not defeated the Goliath of Power. In other words, the superpower remains in control of itself and world events.

[UN Human Rights Council to hold special Myanmar session](https://nation.com.pk/10-Feb-2021/un-human-rights-council-to-hold-special-myanmar-session)

Pinning hopes on a change of President in Washington, especially by countries like Pakistan, has proved to be a futile exercise if not an outright dangerous pursuit. Developing countries with weak institutions and developed countries with over ambitious agendas face finite disappointments once the new President manifestly tells the world that for Washington, America always comes first. For opportunist policymakers in developing countries, such hopes help them escape responsibility, conveniently forgetting that the US general elections brings forth a President who is bound to put his country’s interests first rather than solving, for instance, domestic issues of another country like increasing the economic growth rate, decreasing illiteracy or controlling the price hike. Verily, such hopes are like a future dated cheque that invariably gets bounced.

Pak-US relations are defined by grants, contingencies, distrust and false hopes. Rarely, will the policymakers in Islamabad look at its ties with Washington from the latter’s point of view. In an interaction between a knife and a melon, the former invariably prevails. This fact albeit obvious may also help the policymakers in embarking on the uphill task of formulating a narrative that fits in Pakistan’s hopes for improving relations with the US. There is a need to evaluate in real terms present and future expectations of the US narrative about South Asia and what it entails. On the other hand, expecting unprecedented support from the ‘big brother’ on important issues like the Jammu and Kashmir dispute or Afghanistan’s rigmarole may be avoided. Relations between two states are based on nature, scope and extent of respective national interests rather than emotional inklings. Today’s friends might be tomorrow’s foes and vice versa.

[US Senate declares Trump's 2nd impeachment trial legal](https://nation.com.pk/10-Feb-2021/us-senate-declares-trump-s-2nd-impeachment-trial-legal)

Reliving the memories of Liaqat Ali Khan’s visit to the US in 1950 to its role in facilitating Henry Kissinger’s visit to China in 1971 to contribute in the ousting of erstwhile Soviet Union from Afghanistan to being the frontline state against terror, Islamabad tends to forget the price it had to pay for willingly overlooking its own national interest. It would be interesting to estimate the cost of ‘warming of relations’ with the US in testing times. For instance, facilitating Kissinger’s visit to China might have proved beneficial for Islamabad in creating some goodwill with Washington. But didn’t the détente in Sino-US relations bring New Delhi closer to Moscow, an alliance that would haunt the policymakers of Pakistan for several decades? Eye-opening estimates might emerge if the economic, political, moral, diplomatic, historical, psychological and sociological losses for Pakistan were calculated for its ‘role’ in Afghanistan since the invasion of Soviet troops in December 1979 till today.

[Political laws show Fazlur Rehman's dual standards: Shibli](https://nation.com.pk/10-Feb-2021/political-laws-show-fazlur-rehman-s-dual-standards-shibli)

Estimation that the American approach would dramatically change with regard to China (read CPEC), India, Afghanistan, Middle East and Iran is at best, wishful thinking. That his team dealing with foreign affairs also includes a Pakistan origin Salman Ahmad significant in the context of Washington’s stand on Kashmir is also misleading. Another hope is falsely being pinned on Biden’s past statements on certain vital issues facing the South Asian region. Any major shift in policy would depend on the principle of necessity and in response to any big misadventure by India or in the context of Iran-US relations or any dramatic development in the energy rich Middle East. Analysts who have their fingers on the pulse of regional dynamics may rule out the possibility of any such paradigm shift in Washington’s policy in the foreseeable future. Hoping for the best is good but preparing for the worst is equally important.

In the overall geo-strategic sense, Pakistan is likely to figure prominently especially in the context of South Asian economic, political and diplomatic fronts. Nevertheless, putting all eggs in the fragile basket of ‘importance’ seems neither wise nor viable. Such an argument requires serious rethinking in devising a new foreign policy narrative for Pakistan. Promoting and projecting a narrative is necessary provided a country has one. Flowery speeches are by no means an alternative for pragmatic measures. Surely, there is an urgent need to put the strategic and diplomatic minds together to formulate a narrative that not only depicts the domestic policies, present political and economic situation but also suggests a clearer direction for the country. No country can make or afford a strong and desirable foreign policy in the face of weak economic indicators. In the short history of Pakistan, this will be the first ever narrative developed during a nerve shattering pandemic. Hence, extra care is advised.