**Post-Trump ties**

BY TOUQlR H USSAIN 2020-11-10

WHAT would a Biden presidency mean for US-Pakistan relations? That would depend on several f actors, unknown and known. The main unknown would be the US foreign policy to emerge from the wreck lef t behind by Donald Trump.

Of particular concern to Pakistan would be Washington`s China policy. To anticipate this policy, we need to set aside the hype of a new`ColdWar`andtheso-called`Thucydides Trap`, referring to the tendency of an emerging power and an existing power to go to war as highlighted by an ancient Greek historian. Historical analogies are always half true, and often we end up looking at the wrong half.

The reality is the US and China relationship is complex and multidimensional. The two countries are geopolitical rivals. And China has become a domestic political issue in the US. It is seen as taking away jobs and factories from working-class Americans and posing a challenge to US technological superiority and economic pre-eminence. Yet the economies of the two countries are uniquely intertwined and interdependent, and their cooperation is essential to solving transnationalissues.

Geopolitics, politics and economic nationalism were thus in conflict with geo-economics and global governance. Trump found it expedient to define China solely in terms of politics casting it as an adversary. That must change. Those who are worried that Washington will push Pakistan to be either with China or the US should think again.

Biden will define China not as an enemy but a rival with whom the US has to find a way of competing without confrontation.

Recently on CBS, he said he did not see China as a threat. At the same time, Biden will be tough on Russia. Being a foreign policy traditionalist, he cannot have hostile relations with both Russia and China. With debt, deficits and joblosses caused by the Covid-19 crisis, the need for US economic cooperation with China, a major engine of global growth, will remain. Biden`s focus will be domestic and that will determine foreign policy priorities.

Asking Pakistan to choose between China and the US would only tighten the PakistanChina embrace. Even Washington`s closest allies have not been presented with this stark choice. It is not just America; China too is pivoting to Asia, and to the Middle East, and Pakistan is where the two pivots face of f.

Pakistan cannot be left entirely dependent on China. The truth is that US-India relations alone can neither define US-Pakistan relations nor address all of America`s challenges in the region. Washington may want Pakistan to be a weak ally of China but capable enough of serving American purposes.Here, a reference to the history of US-Pakistan relations is relevant.

Historically, US-Pakistan relations were a f actor of one or two issues. Washington would reward Pakistan for help on what they agreed on, and punish it over what they disagreed on once Pakistan had served its purpose. The flaws of this relationship were fully expose d in the post-9/11 engagement.

Given the multiplicity of issues, the extended duration of the engagement, and the fact that the points of agreement and disagreement could not be disentangled, neither could the reward be held back nor the punishment postponed. The relationship became both conflicted and cooperative as Pakistan was both a facilitator and an obstacle to US objectives, and a scapegoat for the failure of American policies especially in Afghanistan.

Neither that unique bleak moment in the history of the relationship nor its old failed model will likely be repeated. There are new realities now post-US withdrawalAfghanistan, developments within India, India`s provocations vis-à-vis China and its aggressiveness towards Pakistan, and many regional and global transitions.

Washington needs Pakistan`s help in the unresolved crisis of Afghanistan. The USis also concerned about the safety of Pakistan`s nuclear assets, and would like Islamabad to take stronger action against jihadists. TheUSisinterestedintheKashmir dispute but will not help solve it. It is not the dispute Washington has been always concerned about, but the crisis it might generate. Biden may be concerned about human rights too.

Biden, the original architect of the KerryLugar bill, knows that all this calls for engagement with Pakistan within a framework of cooperation where convergence and divergence of policies are reconciled and the two countries` core interests safeguarded to support a sustainable long-term relationship.

The period when relationships were defined by aid is over. However, an enhanced economic partnership is possible depending on Pakistan`s economy. The future of the bilateral relationship is thus as much in Pakistan`s hands as in America`s.  The writer, a former ambassador, is adjunct professor at Georgetown University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the National University of Singapore.