**After the vote**

BY A R I FA N O O R 2020-11-10

THE excitement over Joe Biden`s election was a little reminiscent of the headiness of election victory of Barack Obama. After eight years of a triggerhappy president, who led the US into Iraq an invasion rather widely condemned witnessing the election of the first black president was history in the making. I remember someone laughing as they recounted a message from an American friend: `I hope the world likes us a bit more tonight.

Were such messages exchanged this time around too? Perhaps they were but it did seem that the happiness was directed inwardly, this time around. It may not be wrong to say that Trump, unlike George Bush, was more a burden domestically than internationally, for the Americans. (One year after he was elected, Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize; it was perhaps the singular piece of evidence of the hope that internationally was pinned on him.) On the other hand, Trump`s election and his defeat, rather than Biden`s victory, underlines the insularity of American politics at the moment.

The US is now more polarised and divided than it was then. As of Monday morning, according to The Washington Post, Biden`s lead in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Georgia over Trump was less than one per cent. This could, however, change in the days to come but so far it simply reflects a divided American society.

But Trump`s electoral defeat does not mean the end of the crisis in American politics. And this crisis will continue whether he remains in politics or not.

Trump`s victory four years ago (and Hillary Clinton`s defeat then) was proof of an electorate which is not interested in what traditional political parties and traditional politicians have to offer.

Indeed, Trump`s success four years ago showed for lack of a better phrase that the traditional political system upheld by the parties was broken.

And it is still not fixed.

As a historian quoted in The New Yorker says, `The component of both parties that did not grapple with the insecurity of most Americans -that created the opportunity for exclusionary politics. It`s not Trump. It`s an opportunity that Trump seized.

He tapped into the people`s discontent over economic issues; he appeared more populist and antielite than Clinton in 2016, and for his own supporters he more or less was able to sustain this image four years later too. (So far it seems that Biden`s victory was driven by greater mobilisation of the Democratic vote than in 2016.) That Trump didn`t deliver on his populist politics in four years didn`t deter his supporters is the biggest takeaway from this election.

This economic insecurity will not vanish with Biden`s election and the Republicans will be tempted to tap into it. Trump or his son or someone else from the party could make a similar pitch, at the time of another election. This may prove to be the biggest challenge for the new president.

Hence, the shadows of Trump will continue to haunt Biden; after all, Obama was constantly hindered by the Republican Party during his presidency. One can only imagine the mood of the party after Trump; anyone showing any hint of cooperation will face pressure or criticism from within the party and few will be willing to withstand it especially as this is also the mood within the electorate/ the party`s support base.

Along with this polarisation in society, the divisions within the Democratic Party will not make it an easy ride for Biden either. Analysts are already predicting the problems he will face, especially when faced with a legislature in the hands of the Republicans so far, it seems that the Republicans have a good chance of retaining the Senate and reducing the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives and a conservative Supreme Court. In addition, the Democratic Party is also not a unified force, and some feel that there will be pressure from within his own party Bernie Sanders et al to put in place more pro-gressive policies. Even during such a crucial election, the more conservative members of the party were criticising others of having cost them votes because of their `socialism`. The `left wing` of the party is no less angry Alexandria OcasioCortez`s recent interview to The New York Times says it all where she accuses her party of hostility.

`It`s your own party thinking you`re the enemy.

When your own colleagues talk anonymously in the press and then turn around and say you`re bad...,` she is quoted as having said.

Of course, this is not to say that all the predictions are gloomy. It is always possible that Joe Biden is the centrist who manages to paper over the divisions between his own party and the society he is now leading. He is, after all, a white man who has won the election and is 1(nown for his qualities of empathy his election campaign made much of his own personal tragedies and his ability to connect with people due to his own suffering.

But few are willing to bet on the more hopeful end of the analysis spectrum; after all, it`s hard to forget that eight years of Obama ended in a Trump victory.

But closer to home, it is hard to believe that the relationship with Pakistan will change much due to the new incumbent in the White House. It may not do to pin too much hope on Biden because of his role in the Kerry-Lugar aid bill. Those were different times, and the US back then believed that the war in Afghanistan could somehow still be won.

Now the priorities are different in Afghanistan, as well as the understanding of what is possible in Pakistan. Chances are that the efforts to talk peace in Afghanistan will continue, as will the pressure on Pakistan to deliver. Neither will there be any change to the rivalry with China, which too has its impact on US-Pakistan relations. The biggest change in the region may be the Iran nuclear deal and what it may bring for us.  The writer is a journalist.