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November 11, 2020

**Pitfalls for Joe Biden**

The American people have spoken in favor of Joe Biden in what has been a hotly contested and turbulent election in American history. No other election has had the world hooked on to the TV screens than this one.

TV networks and newspapers around the world including here in Pakistan devoted a fair share of their airtime and print space to the analysis of American politics, and the visions and policies of the rival candidates. Such is the level of interest that an election in a sole superpower generates – and understandably so.

It is time for Joe Biden to prepare for the transition, put together an effective team and start marrying the grandiose campaign promises to the reality of power by designing a list of deliverables. This task is easier said than done, given the complexity of challenges facing the new administration both at home and abroad.

Democrats and their supporters have every reason to celebrate the victory and look forward to the beginning of a new era after Trump’s fractured four years in office that saw the US recede from its international leadership role. After all, Hillary’s defeat at the hands of a new political entrant in 2016 left the Democratic Party shocked, its cadres demoralised and the world stunned.

While it will take the Biden administration some time to reverse some of Trump’s policies and prepare the US for the resumption of its internationalist role, there are some serious pitfalls that the new administration needs to look out for.

To begin with, a conclusion that by defeating Trump, Democrats have been able to inflict a crushing defeat on Trumpism will not only be foregone but also lead to a horrible fallacy. The Democratic victory does not mean that the thoughts and ideology that underline Trumpism have been taken care of.

If anything, the emergence of Trump from outside the system represented the culmination of a process that took decades to come to this pass. His personality, aggressive posture and no-holds-barred messaging resonated with white Americans who were increasingly unhappy over their deteriorating economic conditions for which they held Washington's ruling elite responsible.

Trump seized the moment and successfully articulated the aspirations, fears, and expectations of those who felt wronged by the Washington establishment. He pinned it down to Democrats’ policies that he said favoured the big business and corporations at the cost of average Americans.

President Trump has also been relentless in calling out various Democratic administrations for entangling the US in alliances, wars, and the ‘nation-building’ missions that drained the economy. His criticism of China for running trade deficits, job losses due to automation and outsourcing and the destruction of the manufacturing sector was largely aimed at the policies pursued by the Obama administration.

With Trump likely to be out of the White House, these sentiments and frustrations of average American households are likely to stay and a lot will depend on how the new administration formulates ‘inclusive’ policies that work for all Americans, as Biden put it in one of his presidential debates.

The stiff electoral resistance put up by Trump during the election speaks to the presence of a large constituency of supporters whose unflinching loyalty he commands. The poll outcomes are contrary to the predictions made by pollsters, mainstream media, and PR companies that forecast an overwhelming Blue victory.

Trump, one of the paramount populist global leaders, may have fallen but right-wing populism will certainly survive him. It is, therefore, important to understand the context from which he rose to prominence. One evidence of nationalism and majoritarianism becoming an exclusive identity in multiethnic societies is the increasing trend of otherwise mainstream political parties not only exploiting the fears and hatred of the majority but also exaggerating them for electoral gains.

The latest to join this unenviable list of the right-wing parties such as the Conservative Party in the UK, and BJP in India, to name only a few, is French President Macron’s ruling party that is playing with fire in the name of protecting freedom of expression.

Joe Biden carries the tag of being a Washington’s insider, supported by the American establishment, thanks largely to his over 40-year-old political career that included eight years as vice-president, six-time membership of the US Senate and the chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

This is heavy baggage with which to enter the White House. His campaign slogans may have made a lot of sense to global citizens and raised hopes for many in the US who could not come to terms with Trump’s worldview and his conduct in office. However, Biden will be under tight scrutiny at home especially by those who think that the US system and institutions only protect the powerful and wealthy at their cost.

In the presence of a Republican-dominated Senate and a Supreme Court that has a majority of conservative justices on it, with three of them nominated by President Trump, Biden will find it hard to implement his policies.

Democrats’ support for globalisation as part of pivoting the US to a global leadership role will be celebrated globally but will be anathema to a wide section of American people who look at it as a source of job losses and a decline in their living standards. Given the deep and sharp polarisation that now characterizes American society, there is a possibility of violence becoming a way of political expression by the disaffected segments of people.

Trump may have taunted Biden for representing a radical left, a charge that the latter shrugged off. However, the inclusion of a bit of ‘leftism’ into the administration’s socio-economic policies will stand it in good stead. The appeal of Bernie Sanders’ message lies in his emphasis on the need for righting wrongs by empowering the communities through greater access to free education, health and employment opportunities.

The recommendations of the unity task forces representing moderate and leftist wings of the party that were formed to prepare a united party platform ahead of the Democratic National Convention can be dusted off and included in the policies of the Biden administration. Linked to this aspect of governance is the need for making institutions capable of delivering to the people and building their trust in their ability to step up to the plate.

The rise of populism is a reaction to (perceived or real) ineffectiveness of democracy. The perception that the powerful and wealthy can game the democratic system has undermined people’s trust and made them susceptible to manipulations is dangerous and needs to be checkmated.

The world does not need the start of a new cold war. The Biden administration must guard against the temptation of forming alliances aimed at besieging others and plunging the world to a new phase of uncertainty and power rivalry. If the US needs a healing touch at home, greater statesmanship is required to bridge the international fissures and trust deficits.

Joe Biden faces a moment in history wherein he can chart a way forward that not only serves Americans but also the world at large. The kind of policies he opts for will have consequences and graver implications than those adopted by Trump.

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