**So far so good?**

BY M A H I R A L I 2021-04-28

IT is somewhat disconcerting to find myself almost in agreement with US Senator Lindsey Graham, a particularly odious representative of the Republican leadership that propped up the Trump presidency for four years, and seems determined to perpetuate its sordid legacy.

But he was on the ball when he told Fox News Sunday: `AOC said his first 100 days exceeded her expectations. That`s all you need to know.

Of course, what he meant by `That`s all you need to know` is vastly different from the way many others would interpret New York congresswoman Alexandria OcasioCortez`s statement last Friday that the Biden administration has `definitely exceeded the expectations that progressives had`.

When AOC entered the US Congress in 2018, contrary to the primary desires of the Democratic Partyestablishmentalongside Squad-mates Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayannah Pressley she came across as a breath of fresh air: a legislator determined to challenge not just the egregious excesses of the Trump administration but also the unsavoury realities of her own party`s inclinations.

She had already done her bit by then for the unsuccessful Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016, and she didit again four years later. Last year`s Sanders campaign, although hobbled again by the Democratic establishment, was more successful. At least in the sense that Biden advisers collaborated with Sanders associates in drawing up the election agenda.

Nonetheless, in the run-up to last November`selection,itwaslogicaltoassume that, if elected, Joe Biden would go his own way striving for bipartisanship, as was his wont during three decades in the Senate, and quite possibly achieving very little.

However, Biden has managed to go reasonably far in his first 100 days admittedly an arbitrary criterion that has been in vogue since the initial phase of Franklin Delano Roosevelt`s 1933 inauguration. FDR assumed power during the depths of the 1930s depression, and tried to reboot the US economy through an unprecedented injection of government resources.

It was a partial success it actually took a world war to resurrect the US economy.

Biden`s efforts in the wake of Covid-19 have been compared with FDR`s New Deal and Lyndon Johnson`s Great Society, thwarted in large part by Johnson`s Vietnam woes.

For all his flaws, Johnson did manage to legislate some of the most substantial provisions against racial discrimination since Lincoln`s Emancipation Act 100 years earlier. Ever since, though, there have been efforts to claw back the advances, and Republican-guided voter suppression reached a new level of sorts in Georgiarecently, after the state`s voters gave Biden a tentative majority in the US Senate.

The president, meanwhile, has gone further in his stimulus packages than some of his detractorsontheleftexpected,andhasfacilitated a considerably more substantial role in the Senate for Sanders than anyone might have anticipated. A partial consequence has been that, unlike in 2009 when the advent of Barack Obama was followed by far too much of the `rescue package` being restricted to the economic culprits on Wall Street, the latest stimulus has sustained poorer households.

These are temporary measures, though.

There is the prospect of a massive infrastructure package that would also seek to redress, in some measure, America`s reliance on fossil fuels. Biden recently presided over a virtual global summit ostensibly aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions more sharply than spelt out in the Paris agreement of 2015, but it has been pointed out that whereas the current administration is willing to pursue its goal through concrete measures, it has no objection to the rest of the world chasing thetask through market mechanisms, which have hitherto proved grosslyinadequate.

The Biden administration is also struggling with border immigration measures, and with foreign policy more generally: ties with China andRussia, in particular, remain dismal. The proposedwithdrawalfromAfghanistan,welcome at many levels, is likely to effectively entail handing back power to the Taliban without any official recognition of why the invasion 20 years ago was a grievous error.

But let`s put foreign policy aside, even though US neocolonialism is an intrinsic part of America`s postwar identity, not least in its Latin American `backyard`. However even domestically, there`s little hope of instituting a minimum wage of only $15, let alone the kind of universal healthcare that is routine in comparable nations, or the kind of gun control that might reduce the regular mass shootings.

These three straightforward objectives are not even on Biden`s agenda. And some of the items on his wish list face resistance not just from mindless Republicans but also from Democratic senators such as Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema.

Yes, Joe Biden has exceeded expectations in his first 100 days, but where he will or can go from here remains an open question. m mahir.dawn@gmail.com