

VIEWS

Shen Dingli

US 'strategic' withdrawal is a fiasco

Following the ill-coordinated, messy US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Kabul has fallen into the hands of the Taliban at astonishing speed. The entire world is watching the change of flag from black, red and green of Afghanistan to the white with black *Shahadah* of the Taliban.

The collapse of the Ashraf Ghani-led Afghan government was so swift that it gave no time to the tens of foreign embassies to evacuate their diplomats and other staff. Even more worrisome is the fate of those Afghan people who have worked for the United States administration since the US-led forces launched the Afghanistan War in 2001.

However, despite the ungraceful withdrawal, reminiscent of the US' retreat from Saigon in 1975, President Joe Biden has been courageous enough to fix, eventually, a US historical wrong. The US forces' entry into Afghanistan was endorsed by the United Nations as a legitimate response to the Afghanistan-based al-Qaida's terrorist attack on the US on Sept 11, 2001. Its military operation was approved by the UN Security Council, since the then Taliban government refused to turn in Osama bin Laden. In this context, the US' war in Afghanistan made sense.

With the successful execution of Operation Neptune Spear in 2011, the US forces killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. At that time, the US could claim to have accomplished its mission. However, Barack Obama, then US president, continued the war, and expanded the US military mission, by adding to it the political agenda of spreading American values and culture in the overwhelmingly Muslim-majority country through "nation building".

This ill-advised move was not endorsed by the UN, and the US should not have gone ahead with it because it was something beyond its reach. Given these facts, the Donald Trump administration held talks with the Taliban, even signed an agreement with it saying it would withdraw the remaining US forces from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021.

Its promise to pull out its forces notwithstanding, the US had already delayed its withdrawal from the quagmire it had turned Afghanistan into by 10 years — from 2011 when bin Laden was killed to 2021. These 10 long years have seen the weakening of the US' morale and the huge drain on its resources, forcing Biden to pull all US forces out of Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, in his bid to fix a US historical wrong, Biden has committed another horrendous mistake. After fighting the Taliban for nearly 20 years, the US has the obligation to protect not only its own civilians, diplomats and troops, but also those Afghans who worked for the administration, as well as other foreign nationals in the country and, if necessary, make proper arrangements for them to leave the country in an orderly manner.

Unfortunately, Biden misjudged the situation in Afghanistan, by ostensibly underestimating the strength and reach of the Taliban. The tragic exodus from Afghanistan and the chaotic, heart-wrenching scenes at Kabul airport define yet another shameful moment for the US.

The US military is leaving Afghanistan, ending a war the US could never have won. It was the same logic that led to the US fiasco in South Vietnam in 1975. By admitting its failure, the US has relieved its strategic burden and is redistributing its resources to meet its present need, most obviously, to implement Biden's "3C" policy toward China, that is, to cooperate and compete with, and confront China.

When former US president George

W. Bush declared the "war on terror" in 2001, he sought China's cooperation by admitting that the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement was a globally recognized terrorist organization.

And now that almost all its forces have pulled out of Afghanistan at blinding speed, Washington is requesting Beijing to play a bigger role in the post-withdrawal governance of Afghanistan. So China has every reason to demand that the US respect its sovereignty and national security interests by containing the ETIM.

As the two-decade war in Afghanistan has devastated Afghanistan, the US has no right to quit the country and leave the mess for Afghanistan's neighbors to clean up. Despite withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan, the US has the responsibility to rebuild the country in partnership with any government that is in power — and with the help of regional partners. In this regard, China and other stakeholders including the US should continue to collaborate in order to help build a better Afghanistan, and to ensure it does not become a haven for terrorists again.

In terms of geopolitics, Biden, in his speech on Aug 16, emphasized the

challenges the US faces from China and Russia while explaining why he decided to pull out US forces from Afghanistan — so the US administration could shift its global strategic focus to coping with China and Russia. But terrorism will continue, as Biden said. To curb sporadic terrorism attacks across the world, the US needs to coordinate with big countries like China and Russia.

Global leaders, on their part, should take a long-term view of the situation in Afghanistan now that the US has pulled out of the country without achieving victory over terrorism there. To counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, the US needs to work with China and Russia now and also in the future. The US should not be basking in the illusory glory of "defeating" terrorism in Afghanistan and turning its back on China, and at the same time asking China to contribute to post-withdrawal governance in Afghanistan, in order to eliminate terrorism.

The author is a professor at, and former executive dean of, the Institute of International Studies, Fudan University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Yue Xiaohua

Ecological governance boosts fight against climate change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group I report, "Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis", which was released on Aug 9, is the most authoritative study on climate change, and will help improve global environmental governance and prompt countries to negotiate climate treaties. The IPCC report is expected to be high on the agenda of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Glasgow, Scotland, in October-November.

Compared with the previous IPCC reports, the latest one emphasizes that many of the impacts of human activities on climate change are irreversible, indicating that the global fight against climate change needs to be strengthened to prevent further damage to the environment.

Natural disasters and extreme weather events such as cyclones, unusually heavy downpours, record high temperatures and uncontrollable forest fires have become more frequent in recent years due to climate change. To combat climate change, the European Union, Canada, Chile, Fiji and other economies have enacted climate change policies and set specific carbon emission targets.

On Sept 22, 2020, while addressing the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, President Xi Jinping said China will increase its nationally determined contributions (which according to the Paris Agreement embody a country's efforts to reduce national emissions and adapt to climate change), and take measures to ensure its carbon emissions peak before 2030 and realize carbon neutrality before 2060. Compared with other countries, China's intervening period between peak emissions and carbon neutrality is shorter. So China has to make arduous efforts to achieve the two goals.

In addition, exchanges and cooperation among countries in terms of funding, technology and human resources related to climate change also need to be strengthened to boost the global fight against climate change.

China has included the two goals into national development plans and policy documents, such as the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035; the Guiding Opinions on the Coordination and Strengthening of the Work related to Climate Change and Ecological Environment Protection; and the Notice on Implementing Pilot Environmental Impact Assessment of Carbon Emission of Construction Projects in Key Industries issued by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

Also, some provinces have worked out road maps and action plans for reducing emissions. For example, Zhejiang province has devised a peak carbon neutralization scientific and technological innovation action plan, Hebei province has worked out a plan called "Measures for Coordinating and Strengthening Work Related to Climate Change and Ecological Environment Protection", and Chongqing municipality has made carbon emissions a part of the environmental impact evaluation and included it in the criteria to grant pollution discharge permits.

China's national carbon emissions trading system, which officially started operations on July 16, has the potential to play a key role in achieving China's long-term climate goals — of peaking emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

Under the guidance of the government, Chinese companies are making greater efforts to reduce emissions, with many companies in the energy generating and household appliance manufacturing sectors working out their road maps to achieve their respective targets of carbon neutrality.

And many retail companies and other organizations have introduced incentive plans to motivate consumers to buy energy-saving and low-carbon products to boost green consumption and encourage a low-carbon lifestyle. All this in order to help the country achieve its climate targets as soon as possible.

To achieve "net-zero emissions"; however, China will need to undergo a profound economic and social transformation. And to choose the right path to carbon neutrality, China should reform key industries such as energy, transportation and construction, modify the production and consumption structure, and upgrade the technological standards.

As for specific measures, the role of the economy and the rule of law should be given full play by, for instance, improving laws, standard systems and government supervision, strengthening the market mechanisms including the green certificates and carbon emissions trading systems, and increasing publicity and education.

To better tackle climate change, we need the joint efforts of governments, NGOs, businesses, and people around the world. However, due to their different interests, political systems and technology development levels, many countries have not taken adequate, effective measures to combat climate change. As Inger Anderson, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said at a news conference on Aug 9, only 110 of the 191 signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have submitted new or updated nationally determined contributions ahead of the Glasgow climate conference.

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The author is an associate professor at the Institute of Law, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Kumiko Haba

World needs cooperation, not new 'Cold War'

US President Joe Biden, speaking at the G7 Summit in June, said that a "new world order" based on "value alliance" needs to be built with allied countries. But to build such a world order, European countries and Japan would be forced to side with the US (against China).

Given the importance of China in the global economy today, it is unlikely that the US administration will succeed in its designs. Cooperation with China is indispensable for the European Union and Japan, because without it, they would struggle to recover from the impacts of the novel coronavirus pandemic-induced global economic slowdown.

Widening global economic disparities, the collapse of the middle class and declining economic growth have given rise to populism in the US and Europe, which incidentally has played a big role in the fast spread of the virus in the US and European countries. As such, the US may not succeed in its attempts, without strengthening its alliance with the EU and Japan, to counter China.

Therefore, what should the US, the EU and Japan do? They should, instead of trying to curb China's rise, strive to achieve common prosperity through cooperation with China and other Asian countries, as the US, the EU and Japanese economies are intertwined with the Chinese economy. Indeed, the developed economies can overcome the COVID-19 and economic crises only through cooperation with China and other emerging Asian economies.

In the second decade of this century, the economic growth rate of developed countries was in the range of 1 percent after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the euro crisis. In contrast, the Chinese and Indian economies were

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growing at an annual rate of more than 6 percent. China overtook Japan in 2010 to become the world's second-largest economy and the US in 2014 to become the largest economy in terms of GDP (purchasing power parity).

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund predict that China will overtake the US even in terms of GDP (nominal) by 2030, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development says China and India will be the two largest economies by 2060.

Biden's election as US president, many believed, will put "America back" in global leadership position and restore international relations to their healthy state. However, the US has not changed its cautious approach toward China, and its aggressive strategic Indo-Pacific policy. A typical example of this policy is the so-called QUAD, the informal alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia based on the values of "democracy" and "freedom" and aimed at checking China's rise. The US is now contemplating extending the grouping by including the Republic of Korea, Vietnam and France.

The United States is wary of China because it is afraid it will cease to be the world's superpower sooner or later. And that's why the US is trying to suppress

China before China overtakes it in military power and advanced technology.

Although Japan and Europe are political allies of the US, they understand that it is necessary to maintain economic relations with China to facilitate their economic recovery from the pandemic.

But the US may not allow such political and economic ties to be separated this time.

In their book *2034: A Novel of the Next World War*, A.J. Stavridis, former supreme commander of NATO, and Elliot Ackerman, a US Marine combat veteran of Afghanistan, highlight three factors that could trigger a Sino-US conflict: the Diaoyu Islands, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan question. And they say China might start the war.

But it seems China will not start the war, because it has no reason to do so as it is sure to overtake the US economically if its stable economic growth continues.

Yet if the US triggers a military conflict with China, Japan might be forced to join it. So every possible effort should be made to prevent a war, because even a "limited war" would be devastating for the region — which includes China, Russia and the Korean Peninsula — and would impede regional development for a long time to come.

The US' strategy seems similar to the Munich Agreement. In 1938, Britain and France signed an agreement with Germany (and Italy) ceding the Czechoslovakian territory of Sudetenland to Nazi Germany in the hope it would lead to a war between Germany and the Soviet Union and "save" them from the Nazi army. Similarly, the US may be trying to spark a war among Asian countries to avoid a direct confrontation with China.

Asian countries should not fall into this trap, even accidentally, because

that will hinder Asia's growth and allow the US and Europe to once again dominate the world and Asia in the long run.

The US is trying to isolate China with the help of its allies Japan and the ROK, and some ASEAN member states, so as to ensure it remains a leader of the world economy. Japan needs to support the economic development of Asia and strengthen economic relations with neighboring and EU countries despite maintaining its political cooperation with the US. Nothing would be more dangerous and useless than Japan fighting against China. Such a scenario should be avoided at all costs.

In fact, Japan and EU states should help boost the global economy by coordinating their policies and cooperating with China, India and ASEAN states.

Japan rose from the rubble of World War II to become the second-largest economy in the world through diligence, hard work, technological development, proper planning and cooperation with other Asian economies. It's another matter that China overtook it as the second-largest economy in 2010.

Japan, as an economic and technological powerhouse, should work with China and the ROK to achieve global stability and prosperity. East Asian countries such as Japan, China and the ROK, which are globally superior in economic power, should work together to build a more equitable world order, rather than expanding their military power, increasing tensions and fighting against each other. It should be our mission to make a new world order based on peace and prosperity, and promote the development of the world.

The author is a professor at Aoyama Gakuin University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.