



Catching up

The success of the PLI is likely to hinge on how entrepreneurs weigh the risk-reward equation

The Cabinet's approval of a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the textile sector that is expressly targeted at the man-made fibre (MMF) and technical textiles segments is a belated acknowledgment by the Government that the ground has inexorably shifted in the global textiles trade. A relentless shift in consumer preferences and fashion trends saw MMF surpass cotton as the fibre of choice in the 1990s, since vaulting its share in worldwide textile consumption to about 75%. India's textile and clothing exports on the other hand have continued to remain dominated by cotton and other natural fibre-based products, with MMF having contributed less than 30% of the country's \$35.6 billion in overall sectoral exports in 2017-18. And MMF's share remained relatively unchanged in the last fiscal as well when the sectoral exports were about \$33 billion. While policy makers have been cognisant of the need to bolster support for the MMF segment, the task of crafting a meaningful initiative that would engender enhanced investment in capacity creation, leading to increased exports, has been a while in coming. Wednesday's decision on the focused PLI scheme, with a budgeted outlay of ₹10,683 crore, is the second time in 11 months that the Cabinet has approved what is broadly the same plan, with the Government using the intervening period to incorporate amendments to the incentive structure based on industry feedback.

The aim of the scheme is to specifically focus investment attention on 40 MMF apparel product lines, 14 MMF fabric lines and 10 segments or products of technical textiles. These 64 items have been chosen on account of being among the top-traded lines in the global market as well as India having less than a 5% share in each of them. The inclusion of intermediate products at industry's request also reflects the Government's keenness to ensure the scheme ultimately delivers on the broader policy objectives. The incentives have been categorised into two investment levels. Firms investing at least ₹300 crore into plant and machinery over two years for making a specified product would need to hit a minimum turnover of ₹600 crore before becoming eligible to receive the incentive over a five-year period, and at a second level an investment of ₹100 crore with a pre-set minimum turnover of ₹200 crore would enable qualification for the incentive. On the face of it, the scheme appears designed with a fair deal of thought, but its operational success is likely to hinge on how new entrepreneurs and existing companies weigh the risk-reward equation, especially at a time when the pandemic-spurred uncertainty has already made private businesses leery of making fresh capital expenditure.

Return of the Mullahs

Taliban have sent a clear message that they care little about what the world thinks of them

The debate on whether the Taliban would form an "inclusive government" representing all sections of Afghan society was laid to rest by the Taliban themselves on September 7 when the group's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, announced the formation of the new administration of the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'. Of the 33 Cabinet Ministers named, 30 are Pashtun, two ethnic Tajiks, and one is Uzbek. The Taliban are predominantly Pashtun, who make up some 40% of Afghanistan's ethnically diverse population of 40 million. Women and the Hazara Shia minority — both faced targeted harassment and discrimination when the Taliban were in power in the 1990s — were excluded completely. Seventeen Ministers are on the UN sanctions blacklist for terrorists, including the head of the government, Mullah Hassan Akhund, and Sirajuddin Haqqani, the head of the Haqqani Network. Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's reclusive emir, will be the 'Amir ul-Momineen' (commander of the faithful), a title Mullah Omar had assumed in the 1990s. With the Cabinet portfolios allocated to the Taliban's core and the Haqqanis, and introducing a system that resembles the previous Islamic Emirate known for its disregard for basic human rights, the Taliban have sent a clear message that they care little about what the world thinks about them.

Today's Taliban appear to be stronger than their last avatar. In the 1990s, only three countries recognised the Islamic Emirate; the Taliban also never controlled the whole of Afghanistan. But now, more regional powers are ready to engage with them, including China and Russia. The group has also claimed total control over the country, with Panjshir, the last holdout, overrun earlier this week. With the new government, a stronger Taliban are trying to tighten their grip, though it may not be easy. Ever since Afghanistan became a republic in 1973, no government in Kabul has managed to stabilise the country. The ethnic, religious and political contradictions are too deep to be glossed over by the Taliban's divisive Islamist Pashtun nationalism. In Panjshir, the rebels may have withdrawn to the mountains, like the Taliban did in 2001, but they could regroup and hit back like the Taliban did after 2005. The total exclusion of Shias and marginalisation of other ethnicities could blow back in the near term. Afghanistan has also seen the emergence of a vibrant civil society, especially in its cities, which may not accept the Taliban's rule of the Mullahs quietly. Already, the crackdown on women's rights has sparked large-scale protests by women in Kabul and elsewhere, which was unimaginable in the 1990s. If the Taliban were wise, they would have focused on healing the wounds of the long war and rebuilding the ruptured state and society. But the Pashtun, Islamist, sectarian Taliban seem programmatically incapable of doing that.

The fall of Afghanistan, the fallout in West Asia

While Pakistan takes a lead role, it is West Asia's influence that will shape the future of the beleaguered country



TALMIZ AHMAD

On September 7, three weeks after they walked into Kabul without any resistance, the Taliban announced an interim Council of Ministers. This government-formation was tightly controlled by Pakistan: the head of its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, had made a high-profile descent on Kabul a few days earlier to signal the success of Pakistan's 20-year project to install the Taliban in power and, more immediately, to ensure that the incoming government would safeguard its interests.

The chord with Pakistan

Pakistan appears to have got its way. Afghanistan's acting Prime Minister is Mullah Hassan Akhund, close associate of former Taliban founder Mullah Omar. But this could be a short-term appointment as he has not shone in Taliban ranks either as warrior or administrator. Abdul Ghani Baradar is his deputy, but again, this could be a token position. Baradar had been arrested in 2010 by the Pakistanis for pursuing a dialogue with the Hamid Karzai government without Pakistani sanction and jailed for eight years.

Pakistan's true protégés are Sirajuddin Haqqani, the acting interior minister, and Mohammed Yaqoob, the acting defence minister, a son of Mullah Omar, who is also close to Haqqani. Both have long-standing ties with Pakistan and

should be the real wielders of power in Kabul.

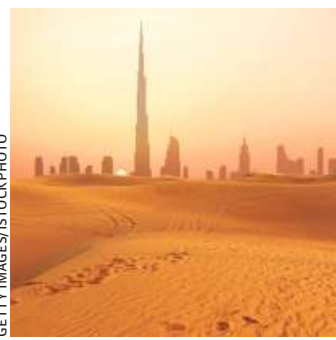
The West Asian players

While Pakistan is playing the lead public role in Afghan affairs, the country's West Asian/Gulf neighbours will be a significant influence in shaping the future of that beleaguered country.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran have been direct role-players in Afghan affairs for over 25 years. In the 1990s, the first two were supporters and sources of funding for the Taliban, while Iran was an antagonist, backing the Northern Alliance against the emirate in Kandahar. After the 9/11 attacks, all three countries became deeply involved with the Taliban. From 2005, the Gulf sheikhdoms have contributed millions of dollars to different Taliban leaders and factions. Iran began a substantial engagement with various Taliban leaders from 2007 and provided funding, weapons, training and refuge, when required. It wanted the Taliban to maintain pressure on the U.S. forces to ensure their speedy departure from the country.

In the 2010s, when the U.S. began to engage with Iran on the nuclear issue, Saudi Arabia became more directly involved in Afghan matters to prevent Iran's expanding influence among Taliban groups. Thus, besides Syria and Yemen, Iran and Saudi Arabia have also made Afghanistan an arena for their regional competitions.

In 2012, Qatar, on U.S. request, allowed the Taliban to open an office in Doha as a venue for their dialogue with the Americans. This has made Qatar an influential player in Afghan affairs, with deep personal ties with several leaders,



many of whom keep their families in Doha.

Competitions for influence

The low-key reactions of the Gulf countries to recent developments in Kabul reflect the uncertainties relating to the Taliban in power, i.e., their ability to remain united, their policies relating to human rights, and, above all, whether the Taliban will again make their country a sanctuary for extremist groups. The country already has several thousand foreign fighters, whose ranks could swell with extremists coming in from Iraq and Syria, and threaten the security of all neighbouring states.

Three sets of regional players are active in Afghanistan today: one, the Pakistan-Saudi coalition, which has been the principal source of support for the Taliban-at-war. They would like to remain influential in the new order, but neither would like to see the Taliban revert to their practices of the 1990s that had justifiably appalled the global community.

Two, Turkey and Qatar represent the region's Islamist coalition and, thus, share an ideological kinship with the Taliban. Both would like to see a moderate and inclusive administration, but Turkey is seen as a political and doctrinal antagonist to Saudi Arabia, while

Qatar remains a rival for the kingdom as it backs political Islam and improved ties with Iran. The interplay of these rivalries will resonate in Afghanistan.

The third player is Iran: while many of its hardliners are overjoyed at the U.S. "defeat", more reflective observers recall the earlier Taliban emirate which was viscerally hostile to Shias and Iran. Iran also sees itself as the guardian of the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara minorities in the country. This consideration, as also its suspicions of Wahhabi influence in the country, led its spokesman, on September 6, to "strongly condemn" Pakistani participation in the Taliban attacks on the resistance fighters, largely Tajik and Uzbek, in the Panjshir valley.

The outlook for security

Besides the challenges that individual countries are grappling with, in West Asia there is the larger issue of regional security after the U.S. withdrawal. The region now has two options: one, an Israel-centric security order in which the Arab Gulf states would link themselves with Israel to confront Iran.

This is being actively promoted by Israeli hawks since it would tie Israel with neighbouring Arab states without having to concede anything to meet Palestinian aspirations. The weakness of this arrangement is that while the regimes of some Gulf states could be attracted to it, their populations are likely to be opposed. The proposal will also ensure that West Asia remains confrontational and unstable.

The other option is more ambitious: a comprehensive regional security arrangement. The facilitators and guarantors of this security arrangement are likely to be

China and Russia: over the last few years, both have built close relations with the major states of the region. i.e., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Recent developments suggest that this need not be a far-fetched proposition any more: one, in January, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states led by Saudi Arabia lifted the over three year blockade of Qatar; two, since April, there have been three rounds of discussions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and plans are in place for the next meetings; and, three, Turkey has initiated diplomatic overtures towards Egypt and Saudi Arabia. None of these initiatives involves the Americans.

Other significant events have also taken place recently. On August 24, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister of Defence, Khalid bin Salman, the younger brother of the Crown Prince, signed a military cooperation agreement with Russia, in Moscow. This is an obvious case of "strategic hedging" as the U.S. has placed restrictions on defence supplies to the kingdom. Besides this, there were the two conferences in Baghdad — one set up a coalition of Iraq, Jordan and Egypt for economic cooperation, while the other, on August 28, brought together the principal regional states to confront shared challenges — all these interactions have taken place without U.S. presence.

These developments suggest that the germ of a new regional security order in West Asia is already sown in fertile ground.

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The national security discourse is changing

Policymakers and practitioners are leading the emerging consensus on the need to fundamentally reassess assumptions



HARSH V. PANT

The global security landscape is undergoing a churn, creating complexities and new realities unlike any time in the recent past. From a rising China to the pressures of climate change; from the challenges of counter terrorism to a seemingly never-ending COVID-19 pandemic (the four Cs), the old order is collapsing much faster than the ability of nations to create the foundations of a new one. National security debates and discourse are, quietly but surely, undergoing an almost revolutionary transformation. While the academic world has long talked about the need for a 'holistic' conception of national security, much of that debate was considered far too esoteric by practitioners. Today, it is the policymakers and practitioners themselves that are leading the emerging consensus on the need to fundamentally reassess our assumptions about national security thinking.

Change in the U.S.

The U.S. policymakers have started changing their cognitive lens when it comes to national security policy making. A process that was started by former U.S. President Donald Trump has been taken forward with gusto by the Biden Administration. Asserting that "foreign policy is domestic policy and domestic policy is foreign policy,"

U.S. President Joe Biden's National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has suggested that his team's task is to re-imagine American "national security for the unprecedented combination of crises we face at home and abroad: the pandemic, the economic crisis, the climate crisis, technological disruption, threats to democracy, racial injustice, and inequality in all forms". He has gone on to argue that "the alliances we rebuild, the institutions we lead, the agreements we sign, all of them should be judged by a basic question. Will this make life better, easier, safer, for working families across this country?"

The U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, too has reiterated this message in his comments that "more than at any other time in my career — maybe in my lifetime — distinctions between domestic and foreign policy have simply fallen away" and that "our domestic renewal and our strength in the world are completely entwined, and how we work will reflect that reality".

Both Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Blinken have taken their cue from their boss, President Biden, who had campaigned on a "foreign policy for the middle-class" and has been unabashed about the need for the U.S. "to invest in our people, sharpen our innovative edge, and unite the economic might of democracies around the world to grow the middle-class and reduce inequality and do things like counter the predatory trade practices of our competitors and adversaries".

There is a growing bipartisan acknowledgement in the U.S. today that if the requirements of American national security during



the Cold War could be largely met by its fleets of bombers, nuclear missiles, aircraft carriers and overseas bases, today's strategic environment requires a different response: one that shores up domestic industrial base, helps in maintaining pre-eminence in critical technologies, makes supply chains for critical goods more resilient, protects critical infrastructure from cyberattacks, and responds with a sense of urgency to climate change.

Not a novel idea

The idea that foreign and domestic policies are tightly intertwined is not a novel one. All serious grand strategic thinking in democracies, at the end of the day looks for sustenance in popular public support. Mr. Trump's rise and his ideas challenged both the liberals and the conservatives in the U.S. foreign policy establishment as they underscored the widening gulf between the policy community and the American hinterland. Mr. Biden and his team have learned their lessons. Mr. Sullivan is working towards integrating the National Security Council with the other components of the White House such as the National Eco-

nomics Council, with the Domestic Policy Council, with the Office of Science and Technology Policy. This will inevitably present its own sets of challenges but there is no shying away from this new reality.

The Indian situation

In India too, we have seen a greater recognition of the challenges emanating on national security from domestic vulnerabilities. One of the most significant consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, has been to reveal how deeply India has been dependent on Chinese manufacturing for critical supplies. At a time when Indian armed forces were facing the People's Liberation Army across the Line of Actual Control, this exposed India to a new realisation that dependence on overseas supply chains is a national security challenge of the highest order, one that cannot be overlooked any more. India has since moved towards shoring up domestic capacities in critical areas and also started looking at free trade agreements through a new lens.

The Indian Army chief, General M.M. Naravane, in his remarks, has also made it apparent that views of the military leadership in this country are also evolving. He has argued that "national security comprises not only warfare and defence but also financial security, health security, food security, energy security and environment security apart from information security" and suggested that instead of viewing national security "primarily from the perspective of an armed conflict, there is a need to take a whole-of-government ap-

proach towards security".

Highlight the synergies

In the post-pandemic world with a serious strain on national resources, it will be important for policymakers to underline the synergies between the civilian and the military spheres. The Army chief has rightfully pointed out a range of tangible and intangible ways in which investment in the armed forces contributes to the national economy such as indigenisation of defence procurement, providing an impetus to indigenous industries, aid to civil authorities or Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations protecting infrastructure, demand for hi-tech military products by the armed forces spurring entire industries, and transportation and logistics capacities of the armed forces acting as force enablers for the Government in times of emergencies.

The Army leadership has done well to highlight the role of armed forces in sustaining a broader conception of national security than primarily focusing on war fighting. As nations across the world reconceptualise their strategic priorities to bring their ends, ways and means into greater balance, questions of resource allocation will become even more contentious and policymakers will need to think more creatively about the roles of various instruments of statecraft. National security thinking is undergoing a shift. India cannot be left behind.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Democracy at stake

The recent statement of the Chief Justice of India, that the Government is not obeying Court orders, is unprecedented in a constitutional democracy. It is destructive of democracy itself because the Constitution has pride of place for the enforcement of the Supreme Court's orders, under Articles 141, 142 and 144. It is needless to cite, much less recite, that the Supreme Court, under those Articles, has ample powers to see that its orders are implemented. It is their restraint which has led to the present state of affairs. Far from lamenting over the Government not

implementing its orders, the top court should turn the question to itself. Therein lies the answer. The present Government's sense of majoritarianism without any constitutional direction has led to this state of affairs. This has to be corrected. And it is not too late.

N.G.R. PRASAD,
Chennai

Monetising assets

The 'monetising of public assets' carries the risk of ultimately putting more wealth in the hands of a select few in the country. In fact these buyers are sure to be utilising the assets only in the businesses which suit them the most. It may also

lead to clandestine transitions by the buyers of such assets who may 'subtle' such assets or properties on perpetual basis to others on which the Government of India will virtually have no control. If the businesses of these buyers flop on account of the many global reasons of depression, there are chances that banks and financial institutions could face difficulties. The Government of India must tread carefully by putting in place a regulatory framework so that private players do not exploit consumers by levying irrational charges in airports, railway or road utility projects.

Transparency in the monetisation of assets has to be ensured.

BRIJ B. GOVAL,
Ludhiana, Punjab

Learning Hindi

There are many who would agree with Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu's views about the fallout of having opposed Hindi blindly. Apart from being spoken and understood across several States, Hindi is the easiest language to learn. I found myself in trouble when I moved to Vrindavan-Mathura from Chennai, being unable to communicate in Hindi. Of course I managed to overcome the handicap by acquiring a fair amount of

spoken Hindi watching children's serials! Let us approach this issue of learning Hindi with an open mind.

M.R. ANAND,
Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh

Srinivasa Sastri

Teacher's Day, on September 5, has passed, which also marks the birthday of scholar-statesman Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. There is another tall Indian, acclaimed for his oratory and command over the English language, who deserves recognition too — V.S. Srinivasa Sastri whose birthday falls on September 22. Both sons of India brought

their share of plaudits to our country. Srinivasa Sastri made a mark at the Round Table Conferences. That Sastri was a spitting image of Demosthenes, that grandiloquent orator and peerless patriot, was the confirmed opinion of all the delegates. The Tamil Nadu government has been recognising noteworthy contributions of the past made by tall citizens, and can perhaps think of honouring Sastri, who was a walking encyclopaedia. Perhaps an academic prize in his honour would be ideal.

MANI NATARAJAN,
Chennai