

Working Paper

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The Biden Presidency and India

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February 2021



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Yoginder K Alagh

Introduction :-

The Biden Presidency will put additional pressures on India as compared to the Trump Presidency. These will relate to Human Rights and National Security, Environment and climate Change and WTO and multilateralism. In this paper, we are interested in the analytical concepts, which will be used in the global debates, as the USA and India follow their interests.

The Biden Presidency is very sensitive to Minority Rights as Constitutionally proclaimed and the US official Human Rights agencies will have more clout. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has already commented on Kashmir, in election debates. It is interesting that Indian media and commentators have concentrated on the bilateral trade, technology and financial resonance of the expected actions of the Biden Presidency. Its political, environmental and global institutional implications have been ignored. These have profound consequences for the country, though the two-minute byte Communications World has no patience for

it. Those who know better, probably prefer to remain quiet for the current "Khan Market gang" knows the propensity of the establishment to shoot the Postman.

The Center for American Progress (CAP), headed at the executive level by an American of Indian origin, Neera Tanden, and founded by John Podesta, who was Adviser to the US Delegation at the Paris Climate Change talks in the Obama Presidency, before President Donald Trump withdrew from the negotiations, had done a lot of work on how to proceed on global and national issues when the consequences can be visualised but not quantified. One of the arguments that the Trump administration had made was data of a quantified kind is not available on Global Warming. During the exercise in Washington organised by CAP, I was invited to lead a possible Indian reaction. CAP then followed it up in India using TERI's good offices. Neera Tandon was influential earlier in Democratic politics. Now of course she will be the Head of the powerful Office of the Budget and Economic Policy and so, important in Indo-US debates.

The restrictions that we have removed on Projects in Mining, in Forests or on Land Use in the natural forests of Kashmir will become the target of discussion World over. Official circles in Delhi are correctly emphasising India's progressive

stand at the Paris negotiations. This should be used to protect the phalanx and, more generally, Environmental Laws, as legislated when Jairam Ramesh was Minister, will need more sensitive implementation. Pressure from Corporate Interests will have to be resisted more firmly. The rights of Adivasis - habitation, livelihood, spiritual affiliation with trees and the jungle - will need greater attention. Projects will be delayed, but what is built will be on firm ground.

Climate Change and Games

We know Climate Change is there. It is affecting our life. But for policy you have to go further. Policy cannot be built only on beliefs, since concrete action is to be taken. Here there are Scientists, many eminent ones, who with sympathy for the environment activists are not sure if the causes can be proved in a measurable quantitative sense. How do we square the circle? India is important in what it does. But US withdrawing from the Paris Agreement shows how important other actors are.

The issue of Climate Change is important and India which is now marginal in the global debates will again have to be in the Center as earlier. The facts are unclear

in magnitudes. How do we factor in uncertainty in decisions, which are important? Its importance is out of the question. Rains and floods in October, when the withdrawal date of the Monsoon is mid-September is much too chastening. A friend told me the MET wallahs say it is not Non-Normal. The estimated variation in Kharif rainfall includes these events. The probability of a repeated delay in the Monsoon, year after year is low, to the point of being a Black Swan event. The later deluge to cross the 'average' makes it more so. So lets not paper over the losses and hundreds dead.

The Environment issue is becoming a 'Style Statement' with celebrity status. Academics and experts are passé in the back row: not even allowed to take a bow. And then there are those who say there is no solid proof. Yes, the loss of life is regrettable but weather is a different issue. In a weird sense, there is an element of macabre truth in such arguments,

How can we make our policy thinking apparatus serious on a non-exactly defined disaster? Below the Outcomes, there must be an answer, behind floods and disaster. How can we energise again the 'immediate' relief followed by more substantial help for the survivors? (Yoginder K. Alagh, 2020(2)).

One method maybe use of Games. Game Theory is all about reactions of different players (stakeholders?) to assumed actions by other 'players'. To simulate the 'Game' is an interesting way of analysing the 'futures' or possibilities in an uncertain field. Conventionally this would be done in voluminous academic tomes, at the end of which the uncertainty remains. A Game on the other hand forces the analysts to be specific to the extent possible in an uncertain world.

The larger global context can be set up by Large countries, India, China, Brazil, big blocks, the USA and the European Union, Continental Africa, the Multilaterals and other groups including business investors and the media. So the views can be stimulated to play their role in the unfolding climate change policies in the context of the global trade regime.

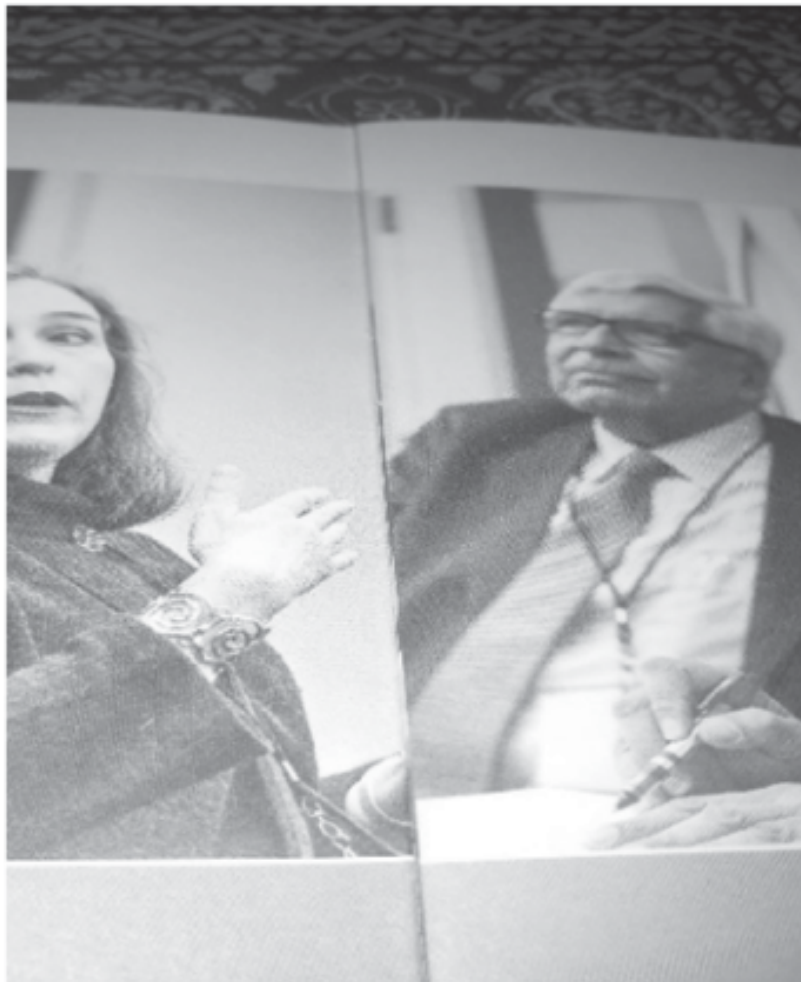
This would obviously involve collaborative games between countries. If land, water and energy, have to be placed in a globally competitive regime, this exercise would very soon develop an exciting realistic paradigm and given the professional commitment of the groups involved, almost realistic processes of communication and trade-offs.

The question really then can be seen as showing a positive outcome that emerges from such cooperation of different actors facing a complex problem and, in that context, pushes them out of short-term zero-sum policy stances. The organisers of the game would come out with their detailed profile of the exercise and its outcomes. The mechanism itself could reduce the uncertainty of data and therefore outcomes.

Quantum jumps must be faced. Avoiding severe water shortages, improvements in irrigation efficiency and cropping intensity will have to be much faster. Bad coal of over a billion tonnes will not to be burnt if alternative energy life and management styles are implemented and hydel and nuclear plants completed, in addition to a major focus on renewables.

Trade and globalisation will have to grapple with these questions. If these kinds of links cannot be established in concrete terms, the concept of an enduring future will remain an empty box. If communities are out of balance with their resource endowments, there can be no question of significant advance in the areas of global concern like climate change, carbon sequestration or biodiversity.

The question was raised in a meeting the Obama backed Committee on American Progress had organized, where I was there. Its Chief, Neera Tanden, an American of Indian origin has invited me there. She is now an important part of Biden Presidency as an official of high stairway. My participation is seen in the following picture:



The meeting made different participants from many countries (groups of countries) to negotiate with each other using Games as an instrument. It led to interesting outcomes in methodology if not practice. Incidentally there was a practical aspect to the exercise, since John Podesta the Chairman of CAP went on to advise the US delegation at the Paris Climate Change negotiations. These issues have contemporary relevance in India as argued in a recent piece by the West Indian diplomat Avinash D. Persaudh (Avinash. D. Persaudh, 2020) and in a piece responding to him, I have argued that games can reduce the uncertainty in the negotiations (Yoginder. K. Alagh, 2020)

The methods question is in my mind an appropriate one to raise. We had three decades ago faced similar methodological problems analysed in my Survey of Research Methodology in Economics in ICSSR, Surveys of Research Methodology in the Seventies of the last decade. I had there raised the questions raised by Ashok Rudra and C.T. Kurien on the primitives: the definitions that arise before analysis. As Rudra said there are so many varieties of rice, so what is the meaning of the 'price's of rice. CT Kurien (C.T. Kurien, 1988) raised similar issues, which again have become important.

There are, of course, lobby groups of NGOs of minorities in our country in Washington. It is legal to lobby in the US. These groups have access to

Democratic Party caucuses, just as there are powerful Hindutva groups that were influential during the Trump presidency - the Hindutva groups had supported Trump in the election and arranged for his very successful India visit. It would be naive to ignore these political groups and consequent field realities. The Biden Presidency is very sensitive to minority rights as constitutionally proclaimed and the US official human rights agencies will have more clout. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has already commented on Kashmir, in election debates. These, of course, are relative statements, since the American structure is one of checks and balances.

Our government had already given up the food security and livelihood clauses as preconditions for discussing "other issues", basically tariff reduction. Murasoli Maran, who was then India's Commerce Minister, had at Doha, stuck to this position. Suresh Prabhu took this position at the WTO Ministerial in Argentina (2017) but later gave up the stand, agreeing to discuss tariff reduction, much to the disappointment of the G-77. The present situation calls for adept handling, since there is rising unemployment and excess capacity. The Pandemic has only made matters worse. Instead of saying mechanically that the "next quarter" will be better, we need a serious turnaround plan, with local and global angles worked out.

Canadian political scientist Andy Cooper, who visited us on my invitation, mentioned that international relations in the world of modern communication are Non-Bismarckian. This is the World of Bono and his global message. We must recognise that a World dominated by Biden, Trudeau Jr and Macron is different from the "strongman's" world of Trump, Roy Harper and Hollande.

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