

Our Opinion. Their Opinion

"When you have a dream, you've got to grab it and never let go."
— Carol Burnett

US HOUSE CLEARS AID FOR UKRAINE TO KEEP FIGHTING

After keeping Ukraine on the tenterhooks for months, the US House of Representatives finally approved a \$61 billion military aid bill for the beleaguered country. More than a third of this would go to replenish weapons and ammunition to the financial advantage of the American defence industry. Another tranche of \$9 billion will be in the form of an economic package which Ukraine need not pay back. The aid will ensure that Ukraine remains in a position to fight Russia until it has exhausted the aid in military purchases. It will then have to make a fresh request for American aid which some Republicans would again resist. Fighting a war on borrowed money against a country like Russia sounds illogical but that is exactly what Ukraine is doing for its survival. Ukraine has to bear in mind that a change in government could result in the US tightening its purse strings despite alarm. Days prior to the US House vote on the aid package, Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal warned Western media that losing the war with Russia could spark a Third World War. Regarding US assistance, Shmyhal emphasized to the BBC, "Without protection... Ukraine will be destroyed." He warned that this could lead to the "destruction of the global security system." President Volodymyr Zelensky previously cautioned that Ukraine's loss could result in an invasion of Poland. Russia has dismissed it as "scaremongering". In the past few weeks Ukraine has suffered heavy losses because of ammunition shortage, described as 10 to 1 by a Ukrainian general. President Zelensky has described the shortage as "artificial".

Biden's small win, big failure in the Gulf

Israel and Iran have been embroiled in a shadow war for more than a decade, but they had never been this close to all-out war. While Biden's maneuvering helped avoid an immediate disaster, it is his own policies that have set the Middle East on its current dangerous trajectory

President Biden's behind-the-scenes crisis management appears to have helped stop a wider war from igniting in the Middle East — for now. But that tactical win for the administration is actually part of its much larger strategic failure in the region. Over the past two weeks, Biden has scrambled to ensure that the unprecedented open exchange of fire between Israel and Iran did not spiral into a full-blown conflict. After Israel struck the Iranian Consulate in Syria on April 1, killing senior Iranian military officials, Biden publicly urged Iran not to strike back while privately negotiating a choreography that ended in Tehran's well-telegraphed barrage of missiles and drones being shot down before they could inflict major damage in Israel. Biden then tried to persuade Israel not to retaliate. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu didn't heed the order, but Israel's response was so muted that Tehran effectively ignored it. Netanyahu's minister of national security called it "lame." Biden deserves credit for orchestrating this crucial de-escalation. Iran launched an attack that failed, as it was designed to; Israel's response was limited enough that Iran could pretend it hadn't been attacked at all. But while the president's maneuvering helped avoid an immediate disaster, it is his own policies that have set the Middle East on its current dangerous trajectory. Israel and Iran have been embroiled in a shadow war for more than a decade, but they had never been this close to all-out war. Since Hamas's attacks on Israel on Oct. 7, Biden has refused to leverage America's considerable influence over Israel to rein in the behavior of Netanyahu's government, to secure a cease-fire or to deter Israel from committing what may amount to war crimes or acting against American interests. Instead, he has followed Netanyahu's lead, even as Israel has put vengeance over interest. Biden has armed Israel in the middle of what the International Court of Justice has said could be considered genocide, including twice circumventing congressional review and oversight of arms shipments. His State Department has made a mockery of his claim of centering

America's foreign policy on the protection of human rights by certifying that Israel is not committing war crimes in Gaza. And most important, he has on three occasions vetoed U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding a cease-fire. He allowed one such resolution to pass last month, only to immediately undermine it by claiming it was non-binding. These policies have not only prolonged the war in Gaza, contributing to the slaughter of civilians and isolating the United States internationally. They have also fueled the risk of a regional war into which the United States could easily be dragged. The war in Gaza led to the breaking of the unwritten cease-fire between U.S. troops in the Middle East and Iraqi and Syrian militias aligned with Iran, which in turn led to a significant rise in attacks on American forces and the killing of three American service members in January. Biden responded by using force against these militias and the Houthis in Yemen, bringing the United States ever closer to open conflict. The president, while he has often said he supports a two-state solution, has also pushed policies that, at best, ignored Palestinians' right to statehood and, at worst, directly blocked them. Before the war, the Biden administration paid little attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and failed to reverse several Trump-era decisions, like the closing of the Palestine Liberation Organization office in Washington and the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, which was the official diplomatic point of contact between the United States and the Palestinians. President Donald Trump's formula for the Middle East asserted that a two-state solution was no longer the key to peace in the region. Rather, economic integration between Arab states and Israel would deliver peace, and Palestinians would effectively have to accept their fate as a people doomed to indefinite occupation. Biden has continued to channel diplomatic energy into building on Trump's Abraham Accords. The accords offered costly American concessions to Arab states in return for their dropping of the demand for Palestinian statehood as a condition for normalising relations

with Israel. Biden embraced this approach early in his presidency, and has sought to outdo Trump by trying to bring in the most important Arab state, Saudi Arabia. But by blocking any hope that peaceful efforts could deliver the national aspiration of Palestinians — the accords offer nothing more than a pinkie promise of a "pathway" to statehood — both Trump and Biden made Palestinian violence all the more likely. Rather than re-evaluate this approach after Oct. 7, Biden stuck to that formula. Biden's pursuit of a normalisation deal with Riyadh was put on hold when the war broke out. Now Washington is once again abuzz with rumors of how close Biden is to sealing a deal between Saudi Arabia's dictator, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Israel's right-wing government. As part of any such deal, Saudi officials are reportedly now considering settling for mere verbal assurances from Israel that it will participate in talks on Palestinian statehood. Though all of this is presented as a new and innovative plan for the Middle East, it is eerily similar to America's decades-long failed strategies of organising the region against Iran instead of supporting an inclusive Middle East security architecture that brings in all of the region's governments. While Iran's ideological animosity toward Israel runs deep, Tehran has on numerous occasions in the past hinted that, within a larger regional arrangement that doesn't exclude it, Iran can live with whatever Israeli-Palestinian agreement the Palestinians themselves find acceptable. Biden has pursued policies that have pushed the Middle East to the precipice of war. His tactical successes in avoiding the worst outcomes of his policies should not be belittled. But they can never make up for his government's broader failure to pursue a strategy that brings real security to America and real peace to the Middle East.

BY-TRITA PARSİ

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If mangoes were for bail, then CM Kejriwal would ride out of jail

As the common people await mangoes to flood the market, a special 'Aam Aadmi' has been quietly devouring them in Delhi's Tihar Jail. There is nothing wrong with eating a mango, but it can create a mess if not done properly. And, this is what the Aam Aadmi Party and its founder Arvind Kejriwal have landed in. The Aam Aadmi Party chief has been caught in the act literally -- eating mangoes, sweets, aloo-puri, etc., in jail. Again, there is nothing wrong with relishing mangoes and all those dishes. After all, he is the CM of the national capital and can have any type of home meal, even inside the jail (as the court has permitted). However, controversy arose when the ED revealed in court that the CM, who is diabetic, was eating mangoes, sweets, etc. to fall sick to create conditions for making a bail plea. A diabetic is supposed to be cautious with food because any deviation can be detrimental to the health system. This is what almost every household in the country knows. Kejriwal and his family know too. So, then why eat mangoes and sweets?

CM Kejriwal is known for disruptive politics and does things for a reason. When he ate mangoes and other things prohibited for a diabetic, he knew what he was doing. However, the likely-would-be-disruption got caught in the eagle eyes of the ED, which complained to the court.

Outside the court, Kejriwal's food has now become the only issue for the AAP to raise the flag against the BJP. Its leaders are alleging that there is a "conspiracy to kill Kejriwal". While the BJP is countering this with its logic of Kejriwal's hit-and-run politics, the Congress is sitting pretty. Interestingly, the main complainant in the excise policy case is the Congress, and yet it has not been attacking Kejriwal, a partner in the INDIA bloc.

Both AAP and BJP are trying to play up the mango episode to their advantage. While they push and shove, the common people are amused at the turn of events. Kejriwal's image of a typical middle-class babu with oiled hair and slippers has worked wonders for him. Delhiites gave him a huge mandate in the Assembly elections in 2015 and 2020. Instead of acknowledging the mandate and fulfilling all the promises he made during the Anna Hazare-led India Against Corruption movement, he simply turned the button off.

Kejriwal's 'style' of working saw his close friends like Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhushan, Kumar Vishwas, Mayank Gandhi and several others, losing favour and finally getting out of the party which they had helped to form. Mayank Gandhi had even said in 2015 while launching his book 'AAP and Down', that "Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has compromised with party principles." He and many others have said that Kejriwal "is autocratic and not democratic" — certainly a quality that does not go with the 'Mango Man' image. For CM Kejriwal, who claimed that the party was based on the principles of transparency, most activities have not been so transparent. And the alleged excise policy scam case is a pointer to this. The ED, which has arrested him in connection with the probe into the alleged case, has called him the 'kingpin'. How the case shapes up in the court cannot be predicted. The Kejriwal of 2011 has simply vanished and the Kejriwal of 2024 is a typical politician whose only concern is to stay in power and get votes somehow. He shares the stage with all those whom he had accused of corruption a decade ago and is, sadly, seeking their validation and support.

Thirteen years ago, he began with the Lokpal movement that sought an ombudsman to look into complaints of corruption against government officials. But today, this former government official and serving Chief Minister of Delhi is in jail on corruption charges.

He had said years ago: "Without jumping into the system, it will be impossible to clean up the system. We are going to challenge this system." He did jump into the system but the glitter of power was perhaps too strong. Ironically, today he is the accused in corruption cases and is using *Mangifera Indica* to beat the system and create a sensation. The now-not-so-mango-man has a lot to answer to the 'mango' people, who prefer to visit and jostle in local markets where the king of fruits, incidentally, is yet to make an appearance.

By-Deepika Bhan

India's foreign policy navigates a new flux in international relations

India's three-fold strategy of handling international relations by opting for bilateral and even multilateral friendships designed to bring in mutual security and economic benefits without prejudice to world peace, asserting the country's position as a major power influencing matters of global security and economic betterment and developing India as a self-reliant nation capable of building its own economic strength as well as defence, has worked to the country's great advantage so far. However, the current geopolitical developments highlighting the injection of religion in international politics, the advent of a new Cold War between the US and China-Russia axis, and the sudden preoccupation of the Joe Biden administration in the US with 'measures to counter Islamophobia' in the environ resulting from Israel-Hamas conflict, have added to the task of policymakers here in keeping India on top of the issues of foreign relations. Pushing Indo-US strategic partnership to a new height to lead the democratic world against shared threats of terrorism, 'radicalisation' and dictatorship, and in the Indian context, countering the Sino-Pak axis which represented an alliance of a Marxist state with a fundamentalist regime, have been the two major planks of India's foreign policy. India believed that both the US and this country were on the same side of the fence on global commons. On both the Ukraine-Russia military confrontation and the Israel-Hamas conflict, India took an independent stand favouring cessation of hostilities and talks for settlement --

in one case on the plea that security concerns of both sides should be understood and in the other, on the acceptance of a two-state solution in Palestine. India's stand was acknowledged as an unbiased policy by the international community and this enhanced the stature of this country as a world power whose voice mattered on global issues. The political divide between the US-led West on one side and the China-Russia combine on the other that was still ideological -- though economic rivalry also mattered a great deal -- is getting impacted now by faith-based conflicts that were playing out across the world -- particularly in the Middle East. This was compelling the US to temper its foreign policy with the domestic compulsion of not alienating its Muslim population following the killing of over 30,000 Palestinians by Israel -- mostly women and children -- in the ongoing conflict. India, on its part, has to watch out for the consequences of the new-found initiative of the White House to roll out steps against 'Islamophobia' and be more assertive about rebutting any attempts by international lobbies to run down this country on matters of internal freedom and treatment of the minorities. The Islamic radical forces represented by the Taliban-Al Qaeda axis and ISIS attack US interests because of political animosity and go after Shiite Iran, the Alawite regimes of Syria and Iraq and the Iranian proxies like Hezbollah active in the Middle East, on account of religious hatred. The attack of ISIS on a hugely attended concert on the outskirts of Moscow on March 22 -- barely 20 kilometres from

the Kremlin -- as a result of which 143 persons were killed and more than 300 injured, was attributed by the radical Islamic outfit, to the Russian support for the Syrian President -- who belonged to the Alawite sect of Shiism -- and also to the "atrocities" of Vladimir Putin's Russia on Chechen Muslims who are Sunnis. ISIS -- and also the Taliban-Al Qaeda combine -- carry the historical legacy of the anti-West Wahhabi 'revolt' of the 19th century and the 'revivalist' memory of animosity towards Shiites. The faith-based motivation of ISIS thus can be said to have led it to target Russia keeping the latter at par with the US-led West -- political opposition in this case also accruing directly from religious antagonism. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is a Sunni extremist state but as a close US ally in the Muslim world, was inclined towards accepting the Abrahamic accord of UAE with Israel. In the wake of the Israel-Hamas conflict that broke out with the terror attack of Hamas on Israel on October 7 last year, Saudi Arabia -- like India -- emphasised the need for a pause in Israel's military attack on Gaza to minimise civilian casualties there. Iran and its armed proxy, Hezbollah, have sided with the Sunni Hamas because of their political antipathy towards Israel -- the closest friend of the US in today's geopolitics -- would override everything else. Israel and Iran happened to be the major contenders for power in the Middle East and the political rivalry between them guided their responses. Iran would also, to a certain degree, share concern on the broader Islamic issue of Israeli

encroachment on Al Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem -- the third holiest centre for Muslims of the world. As regards China, the Chinese move of making it up with the Taliban that had reestablished its Emirate at Kabul in 2021 -- again with the help of Pakistan -- in return for the facility granted to China for extending its B&RI to Afghanistan, invited the ire of ISIS which attacked Chinese diplomats in Kabul in December 2022. Of course, ISIS attacks on the Shias in Pakistan and the Hazaras in Afghanistan also continued. ISIS now leading the Islamic radical forces would not take kindly to Pakistan's effort to draw close to the US. An interesting fallout of the Israel-Hamas conflict is that the huge military assault of Israel in Gaza in retaliation to the October 7 attack of Hamas, had produced a wide-scale pro-Muslim demonstration in the US and elsewhere. Hamas had justified its attack on Israel on the grounds that Israel had imposed its authority on Al Aqsa mosque in April 2023 and had continued with the creation of settlements in Gaza and the West Bank. From India's point of view, as already mentioned, a concern is that the pro-Palestine opinion could encourage anti-India lobbies to raise the issue of protection of Muslim minority in India. Any demonstrations in India in this regard would impact the internal security situation here. India is rightly pursuing a foreign policy that best suits a multi-polar world order and allows for a non-aligned approach that serves the best national interests in the spheres of both security and economic development. Notwithstanding

the concerns of the Biden administration over the fallout of the Israel-Hamas conflict, Indo-US friendship has to be pushed deeper for the most important reason that China in strategic alliance with Pakistan, posed a major threat to India's national security. While India was strengthening its role in Quad led by the US because there was convergence on threat perception relating to China between the US and India, this country would be justifiably concerned over any attempt by the Biden administration to keep Pakistan on the side of the US at the cost of India's national interests. There are fresh indications that the US and Saudi Arabia -- two countries that mattered to Pakistan the most -- wanted India to pick up the thread of talks with Pakistan. India has once again made the point that it would be willing to attack terrorists behind cross-border, on the soil of Pakistan itself, which was a way of reminding Pakistan that it would have to draw down on terrorism before India could respond to the suggestion of Indo-Pak talks. India can of course handle the narratives of 'majoritarianism', 'illiberalism', and 'safeguarding of minorities' on its own since secularism was built into this country's electoral democracy by way of the universal adult franchise. India is welcoming defence imports from the US, Russia, and France in line with its own sovereign requirements and this should work well since India's handling of international relations rested on the country's assertion as a major power of the world on issues of global peace and economic advancement.

By-D.C. Pathak