

Headlines:

- **US Wants Pakistan to Keep Afghan Border Open for DPs**
- **The Wheel Risks Turning Full Circle in Afghanistan**
- **When the Chips are Down: Biden's Semiconductor War**

Details:

US Wants Pakistan to Keep Afghan Border Open for DPs

The United States wants Pakistan to keep its borders with Afghanistan open for Afghan refugees, a demand that could strain already tense relations between the two countries. "So, in a place like Pakistan, it'll be important that their borders remain open," said a senior State Department official while briefing journalists on the new US refugee admission programme for Afghan nationals. "Obviously, if people go north or if they go via Iran to Turkey ...(they) have an opportunity both to enter the country as well as to register with either the government or with UNHCR," the official added. The new programme, announced on Monday, applies to those who worked on US-funded projects and to Afghans employed by a US-based media or non-governmental organisation (NGO). An earlier programme, known as the Special Immigration Visa (SIV), covers interpreters and others who worked for the US government agencies, and their families. Besides Pakistan, the US State Department has also asked Turkey to allow Afghans to stay in the country for up to 14 months before they are resettled in the United States. National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf said at a briefing in Washington this week that arrangements should be made to keep displaced Afghans inside their country instead of pushing them into Pakistan. "Why make them dar-ba-dar (homeless)? Make arrangements for them inside their country. Pakistan does not have the capacity to take more refugees." The Turkish government too has criticised the US plan to use third countries to resettle Afghans, saying the move would cause a "great migration crisis" in the region. "We do not accept the irresponsible decision taken by the United States without consulting our country," the Turkish Ministry Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued in Ankara. "If the United States wants to take these people to its country, it is possible to transfer them directly to their country by planes." There are two countries that can play a pivotal role in this resettlement plan, Iran and Pakistan. Since the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran, US policy makers look at Pakistan to help them implement this programme. Pakistan, however, appears reluctant to do so. Since 1979, Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghans and more than three million are permanently settled in the country. Pakistani officials argue that their economy is not strong enough to absorb more refugees. [Source: The Dawn]

The US is using Pakistan and Turkey to manage the fallout of a Taliban takeover. However, despite the criticisms emanating from Islamabad and Ankara, Pakistan and Turkey will help the US safeguard its interests in Afghanistan.

The Wheel Risks Turning Full Circle in Afghanistan

After 20 years of US and Nato military involvement in Afghanistan, more than 3,500 coalition deaths and trillions of dollars spent, the wheel risks turning full circle. New

advances by the Taliban as allied troops withdraw have put the future of the country, and all the undoubted gains of the past two decades — especially the opportunities to study and work for girls and women — on a knife-edge. Pressure at home to end America's "forever wars" has been steadily growing. Former president Donald Trump had sharply reduced troop numbers and brokered a deadline of May 1 this year to remove the rest, provided the Taliban kept to commitments in a peace accord agreed in Doha last year. President Joe Biden's announcement in April that all US troops would withdraw instead by September — rather than extending their presence — had domestic political logic. But it looks ever more like a tragic miscalculation, one that the US will come to rue. American casualties had been relatively low since 2015 even before direct talks between the US and Taliban commenced in 2018, and the costs of the reduced US presence were much lower. Yet support from remaining US and Nato troops enabled the Afghan army at least to preserve a form of stalemate. The Afghan government had control of its most populous cities, and the Taliban was unable to advance on them. The coalition departure is having a significant direct and psychological impact on the Afghan military; the parallel withdrawal of about 10,000 contractors also affects the ability to maintain aircraft and equipment. The Taliban has taken control of economically important border crossings and more than half of Afghanistan's districts. It is now besieging provincial capitals such as Lashkar Gar. That raises the spectre of either the reinstallation of the brutal, theocratic Taliban rule Afghanistan endured from 1996 to 2001, or intensified civil war. A new refugee wave could head for neighbouring countries, and for Europe. The country could again become a haven for groups such as al-Qaeda to mount attacks on the west — just what the 2001 invasion was meant to prevent. None of this is yet a certainty. Indeed, acting or speaking as if it is risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy — prompting more Afghan soldiers to lay down their US-supplied weapons and return to their villages, and more citizens to flee the country. There seems little chance of the US reversing its withdrawal decision. But it can help prevent a Taliban takeover by persisting with air strikes launched from foreign bases, and special forces operations; the top US general in the country has hinted air missions may continue. Regional powers such as Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India, China and Saudi Arabia — none of which has an interest in Afghanistan becoming a black hole — could also work together, if they chose, to push the Taliban to make concessions in return for recognition. These might include a power-sharing agreement or peaceful transfer of power that would include guarantees on women's rights and free expression. Some in the Taliban leadership do not wish to become, once more, a pariah state, and recognise that to run the country successfully they would need some legitimacy, plus foreign trade and aid. [Source: Financial Times]

The rate at which Taliban is seizing and threatening provincial capital indicates that the US is increasingly toying with the idea of turning the clock back to before September 11, 2001. This raises an interesting question about Musharraf's insistence on siding with America, even though it is quite obvious now that Musharraf had a plethora of strategic alternatives.

When the Chips are Down: Biden's Semiconductor War

Export control policy in the semiconductor sector — an industry that supplies the world's computer, smartphone, appliances and medical equipment industry with electronic chips — was at the forefront of Donald Trump's tech war against China. The addition of China's top chipmakers, such as Huawei and the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), to the US Department of Commerce's "entity list" between 2019 and 2020 brought an abrupt stop to the two countries'

technological cooperation. Beijing's response was a vow to achieve self-sufficiency in semiconductors by 2030. Joe Biden's inauguration came at the height of this semiconductor war. Industry players looked expectantly to his review and potential reversal of Trump's export control policy. However, Biden's behaviour increasingly suggests that the overall direction of US export control will remain the same under his presidency as under Trump's, accompanied by further measures to contain China's technological rise in semiconductors. A quick examination of China's chokepoints in the semiconductor industry reveals why an export control policy remains essential for US strategy. Although China is catching up rapidly in terms of manufacturing, it still struggles to master the specialised production tools that are essential for developing high-end chips, such as Electronic Design Automation (EDA) and Semiconductor Manufacturing Equipment (SME). As the EDA and SME sectors are currently dominated by firms in the United States and Japan as well as by the Netherlands' ASML, American policy has proven effective in leveraging this particular chokepoint against China. Two rounds of export control measures under the Trump administration in 2019 and 2020 have prevented Chinese chipmakers, as well as global foundries that cooperate with Chinese firms, from accessing US-made semiconductor production equipment and software. These blockades have seriously constrained China's ability to pursue technological advancement in the industry. Despite its effectiveness in curbing China's technological rise, Trump's all-out approach to a semiconductor export ban has incurred significant economic costs. American semiconductor firms such as Qualcomm and Broadcom have sustained large losses as a result of the ban, given their sizeable revenues in the Chinese market. The CEO of ASML has also raised concerns that the export ban will negatively affect research and development, and technological innovation. The business community has responded with calls for a policy upgrade. In a late-2020 report, the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) criticised Trump's export ban as being "overly expansive, covering non-sensitive commercial semiconductors and related technologies", calling instead for a policy that is "narrowly targeted to specific items that advance clear national security and foreign policy objectives". The adoption of "targeted export controls focused on chokepoints" has also been advocated in a lengthy report compiled by the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence — a US government advisory group led by Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google and a major fundraiser for the Biden campaign. Biden's steps thus far suggest that he intends to implement a more targeted export control policy towards China that prioritises national security. In April, the president identified several Chinese firms and government labs that rely on advanced chips made with American tools to build supercomputers, which could have profound applications for developing modern weapons and an advanced national security [Source: The Interpreter]

American efforts to contain China is oscillating between a technology war and economic growth. The US business community needs strong relations with China in order to grow, otherwise the US is likely to face an economic deflationary period for years to come.