

Headlines:

- **COVID-19: Vaccine Nationalism, High Prices and Supply Chain Issues Slowing Worldwide Coronavirus Inoculation**
- **No Change in US Policy on Kashmir, says US State Department**
- **US-China Competition: A Bipolar Technology Order**

Details:

COVID-19: Vaccine Nationalism, High Prices and Supply Chain Issues Slowing Worldwide Coronavirus Inoculation

Vaccine nationalism, high prices and supply chain issues are standing in the way of the world getting inoculated, according to scientists writing about the coronavirus pandemic in The Lancet. More than two thirds of the world's doses have been secured by governments representing just one sixth of the world's population. In an article penned by seven experts in fields including vaccines, health policy and infectious diseases, they outline the steps needed to be taken to ensure as many people as possible get jabs against COVID-19. Lead author Dr Olivier Wouters, from the London School of Economics and Political Science, said: "Several manufacturers have successfully developed COVID-19 vaccines in under 12 months, an extraordinary achievement. "But the stark reality is that the world now needs more doses of COVID-19 vaccines than any other vaccine in history in order to immunise enough people to achieve global vaccine immunity. "Unless vaccines are distributed more equitably, it could be years before the coronavirus is brought under control at a global level. "The questions now are when these vaccines will become available, and at what price." There is also concern about the pricing of vaccines. Jabs like the Oxford/AstraZeneca one have been offered for as little as \$5 (£3.60) for a course, while at the top end some China-developed vaccines are being offered for \$62 (£44.80) per course. The article's co-author Professor Mark Jit, from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, warned that richer countries overordering is putting others at risk. He said: "Securing large quantities of vaccines in this way amounts to countries placing widespread vaccination of their own populations ahead of the vaccination of healthcare workers and high-risk populations in poorer countries. "Based on known deals, governments in high-income countries representing 16% of the global population have secured at least 70% of doses available in 2021 from five leading vaccine candidates." [Source: Sky News]

Security competition between rich nations is fueling vaccine nationalism. This threatens to undermine the fight against Covid-19. For vaccinations to be effective about 80% of the world's population must be inoculated, and this requires equitable distribution of vaccine shots for the poorer countries. Failure to do so means that new variants will break out, and compromise the effectiveness of existing vaccines thereby delaying prospects to bring the virus under control.

No Change in US Policy on Kashmir, says US State Department

The United States State Department has clarified that there has been no change in America's Kashmir policy and Washington still considers both Jammu and Kashmir as a territory disputed between India and Pakistan. The clarification, given at a news briefing on Wednesday afternoon, followed a string of statements by US President Joe Biden and senior officials of his administration, outlining their policies towards the South and Central Asian regions. The region includes India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China and the policy outlines indicate a gradual change of emphasis from Pakistan and Afghanistan to China. The statements also show a greater US reliance on India to help counter China's growing influence in the region. But the clarification on the Kashmir issue shows that the Biden administration is not insensitive to Pakistan's concerns either. "I want to be very clear, there has been no change in US policy in the region," said State Department spokesperson Ned Price when reminded at a briefing that a tweet the department posted earlier on Wednesday did not mention the region's disputed status. "Is this a change in policy? Does the State no longer recognise this (Jammu and Kashmir) as a disputed territory? Is there some sort of change in position that we need to know?" asked a journalist while referring to the tweet. The tweet in question welcomed India's decision to restore access to 4G mobile internet in the disputed region but identified the area as "India's Jammu and Kashmir". "This marks an

important step for local residents, and we look forward to continuing political & economic progress to restore normalcy in J&K,” the State Department had commented. The journalists attending the briefing noticed this omission and asked the spokesperson to clarify the department’s position who said the US still considered Jammu and Kashmir a disputed region. Pakistan, however, said it was "disappointed" by the reference to Jammu and Kashmir by the US State Department. "We are disappointed to note the reference to Jammu and Kashmir in the US Department of State’s tweet regarding the resumption of 4G mobile internet in [IoK]," the Foreign Office spokesperson said when asked about the tweet. He said "the reference is inconsistent with the disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir as recognised by numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions and the international community." The FO noted in a statement that Jammu and Kashmir was one of the oldest items on the agenda of the UNSC, which remained unresolved because of "India’s intransigence and unwillingness to implement the relevant UNSC resolutions and its own solemn commitments made to Pakistan, the Kashmiris and the international community" [Source: Dawn]

At this moment in time, America is not interested in resolving the Kashmir dispute, as it needs India to counterbalance China. The Pakistani leadership needs to move on and prepare all means for liberating Kashmir and ending Hindu domination of the Kashmiris.

US-China Competition: A Bipolar Technology Order

A new report authored by China scholars and influential voices from the U.S. tech industry, including former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, has raised eyebrows after calling for “bifurcation” between the U.S. and China tech sectors. The report, leaked by Axios, wrote that there is “no returning to the pre-Trump ‘status quo,’” and argued in favor of “some degree of technological bifurcation” between the two countries. Its release comes at a moment when observers in the U.S. and China are keenly watching the Biden administration for clues as to the extent to which it plans to reverse or continue hawkish policies introduced under former president Donald Trump, which included a slew of sanctions, bans, and export restrictions on Chinese tech companies. Observers suggest that the report’s authorship, including experts with close ties to the Democratic Party and figures in the new administration, indicate that U.S.-China technology competition is likely here to stay. But the report was clear in criticizing the Trump administration’s approach to tech competition, writing that “the Trump administration’s policies have done little to arrest America’s eroding technological advantage.” A key point of disagreement was with the previous administration’s policies on immigration, with the report’s authors calling for a significant expansion of schemes to welcome highly skilled immigrants. Notably, the authors argued that “most scientists & engineers strongly prefer to live here over China,” pointing to the high rate of retention of Chinese-born STEM PhDs in the U.S. But officials in the Trump administration may have eroded those preferences, amid an initiative by the FBI to scrutinize academics of Chinese descent’s affiliations with Chinese government institutions. Most recently, the arrest of MIT professor Gang Chen in the final days of the previous administration spurred outrage in the academic community, with MIT speaking out vocally in his defense and pledging to cover his legal fees. The report’s authors also laid out a menu of options short of a ban that could constrain the reach of Chinese apps in Western markets, while leaving the door open for total bans as a measure of last resort. Recommended measures include some policies that were adopted by the Trump administration, such as restrictions on U.S. high tech exports targeting individual Chinese companies. Other recommendations include requiring that Chinese companies adhere to certain technical requirements such as end-to-end encryption, open sourcing and code audits, and data localization. “Biden is most likely, on the technology front, going to keep things the way the Trump administration has made them,” said Abishur Prakash, a geopolitics expert at the Center for Innovating the Future. “Whether it’s regarding Alipay, whether it’s regarding TikTok, whether it’s regarding Chinese STEM students — across the board holistically, there’s not a lot of space for change.” [...] The Biden approach to Chinese technology issues will be different than Trump’s in at least one key area: Biden officials have said they plan to work with other Western democracies to create a united front against China’s influence. “Whether the techno democracies or the techno autocracies are the ones that get to define how technology is used — the technology that dominates all of our lives — I think is going to go a long way to shaping the next decades,” Anthony Blinken, who was confirmed Tuesday as secretary of state, said last week. [Source: China Digital Times]

It is very clear that America is apprehensive of China’s technological prowess in digital technologies and the capacity of Beijing to spread its technological infrastructure across the globe. Therefore, it is not surprising for the authors of the report to sacrifice openness of free trade under globalization for a bipolar technology order.