



Krasno Analysis 2020

ENGAGEMENT, MULTILATERALISM, AND CAUTIOUS GLOBALIZATION: President Biden's Foreign Policy

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Election night on November 3, 2020, and the days that followed proved to be hours of high drama. Throughout Joe Biden adopted a patient, mature and statesmanlike posture emphasizing that it was his objective to unite the nation and bring the country together, once he had been inaugurated. His magnanimous speeches as President-elect, focusing on battling the Covid-19 crisis, were of equally sober quality. He highlighted the necessity of a united and imaginative approach to the nation's problems.

This is also the strategy we can expect President Biden to adopt in the conduct of American's foreign relations. Just as President Trump did his utmost to divide the American people and sow fear and mutual distrust, he also made an almost deliberate effort to fall out with America's closest allies in both Europe and Asia and antagonize countries such as China where relations had been on a downward course for several years already. In contrast, we can expect the Biden administration to steer a cooperative, multilateral and much more stable and predictable course. Biden will attempt to engage with both allies and foes and will not to be tempted to pursue an isolationist, protectionist or semi-authoritarian policy. He has promised, for instance, to convene a global 'Summit of Democracy' during his first year in office.

Biden is aware of both the advantages of globalization but also its economic pitfalls and risks. The new President can be expected to attempt rejuvenating America's global leadership position by, for instance, rejoining the *Paris Climate*

Treaty and the *World Health Organization* and, under certain conditions, the nuclear deal with Iran (the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*, JCPOA). Biden is aware of the importance of upholding the rules-based global order and finding a new consensus on crucial global governance issues. Most likely he will take the initiative to attempt reform the *World Trade Organization* in cooperation with other countries and perhaps even consider re-joining the *Transpacific Partnership* (TPP), an economic organization with mostly Asian member states, which Trump had withdrawn from during his first few days in office.

For reasons of space, in the following I will focus on America's most crucial relationships: the ones with Europe and China.

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

During the Trump administration European-American relations deteriorated to an almost unprecedented extent. Only during the run-up and in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq invasion were relations equally bad. Unlike Trump, however, Biden is aware of the weight the European (and Asian) allies bring to the table and how this strengthens America's standing and influence in global affairs a great deal. While the Biden administration will also urge the Europeans to spend more on defense, it will not question the importance of NATO. Biden will not try either to divide the Europeans among themselves in order to weaken the European Union (and by implication the process of creating an ever more politically united European continent). Trump mistakenly believed that this would provide him with an advantage in US-EU trade negotiations.

In fact, there is a good chance that Biden may attempt to revive the negotiations for a *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP) which had been started by the Obama administration but were quickly abandoned by Trump. Biden's balanced and well-grounded mature personality will also ensure that a lack of chemistry and political difficulties with individual European leaders (the Hungarian and Polish leaders come to mind for instance) will not lead to the personalization of the entire transatlantic relationship and result in public bickering and griping as was frequently the case under Trump. In particular, Trump had poor relations with Germany's Angela Merkel and was hardly on speaking terms with her toward the end of his term in office.

The Biden administration will not pay particular attention to the so-called "special relationship" with the UK. Populist Prime Minister Boris Johnson is unlikely to receive much special attention in the Biden White House. Perhaps influenced by his Irish background, Biden was not impressed by Johnson's willingness to sacrifice the preservation of an open border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland - and thus endanger the 1998 'Good Friday agreement' which ended 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland - in order to obtain a more advantageous Brexit deal with the EU.

The US-EU Dialogue on China, agreed upon between Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the EU Commission in October 2020, however, can be expected to be continued under the Biden administration. After all, much more intensive consultations with America's allies regarding some of the world's pressing problems will be one of the hallmarks of the Biden White House.

CHINA

While the country was deeply divided, even in foreign policy matters, during the Trump administration, there existed a rare consensus regarding the necessity of a tough policy toward China. It is unlikely that this will change quickly under the new administration. And in view of the many doubts about Biden's 'toughness' during the election campaign, he can hardly afford to come across as being 'soft' on China. Still, similar to embarking on a new re-set policy with the EU (as well as possibly toward Russia and a number of other difficult countries), a new, more constructive approach toward China can also be expected.

Biden's China policy will be more nuanced, less focused on personal relations with Xi Jinping (or for that matter other strongmen in world politics) and more focused on re-establishing bilateral and multilateral communication and consultation channels with Beijing. It will be a significantly less volatile and more predictable approach. Biden, however, will put a much greater emphasis than Trump on human rights (Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia) and will expect China to be much less assertive in the South China Sea, toward Taiwan and within the context of Beijing's huge 'Belt and Road' initiative, an ambitious global infrastructure program.

But Biden will also look for opportunities to cooperate with China. Climate change, relations toward Iran's nuclear policy but also perhaps a common approach to African development issues may be part of such a cooperative agenda. He will not hesitate to explore other areas of common interest either, such as developing a global cooperative framework for dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. The new President will also be interested in re-establishing a bilateral political and economic/trade dialogue with Beijing. While not being as keen on re-locating important supply chains back to the U.S. as Trump was (for medical equipment for instance and in AI/robotics developments), Biden will not hesitate to pursue a similar strategy if he feels that China continues to play unfair in global trade policy matters. America's trade deficit in goods with China, intellectual property theft matters and reciprocal market access issues will also be areas of great concern for the new administration. Still, Biden is not interested in pursuing a policy toward China that may lead to a "new Cold War," though he will not allow his country and his allies to be taken "for a ride" by China either.

CONCLUSION

The new Biden administration's policy of engagement and cooperation with both allies and foes is meant to overcome the perceived decline of America's global standing and lead to the revitalization and even enhancement of the country's unique global superpower position. Whether or not this objective can be achieved will depend to a significant extent on the quality of Biden's foreign and economic policy team and, not least, also on the willingness of Washington's allies in Europe and Asia to continue accepting, and supporting, America's global supremacy.

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Published November 9, 2020 by Krasno Global Affairs & Business Council @ UNC-Chapel Hill.

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