The book cover features a dark blue background with a faint white outline of a world map. On the left and right sides, there are close-up, low-key portraits of Donald Trump and Joe Biden, respectively. The text is centered and reads:

**AFTER
TRUMP**
WHAT THE
GLOBAL SOUTH
CAN EXPECT
FROM
**JOE
BIDEN**

EDITED BY
SHALMALI GUTTAL

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AFTER TRUMP

WHAT THE GLOBAL SOUTH CAN EXPECT FROM BIDEN

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Focus on the Global South
4th Floor, Wisit Prachuabmoh Building,
Chulalongkorn University
Phyathai Road Bangkok 10330, Thailand
Tel: +66 2 218 7363
Fax: +66 2 255 9976
Email: info@focusweb.org

WWW.FOCUSWEB.ORG

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

After Trump: What Should the Global South Expect from a Biden Presidency?

BY SHALMALI GUTTAL

6

Why Things Will Get Much Worse Before They Get Better for the United States

BY WALDEN BELLO

10

The Biden Presidency: A Fragile Centrist Interregnum in an Era of Radicalization

BY WALDEN BELLO

14

Foreign Policy After Trump

BY NICK SERPE

18

Ten Foreign Policy Fiascos Biden Can Start Fixing on Day One

BY MEDEA BENJAMIN AND NICOLAS J.S. DAVIES

22

What Will a Biden Presidency Bring to the Asia Pacific?

BY WALDEN BELLO

28

Uncertainties and Contradictions: Implications of a Biden Presidency for Philippine-US Relations

BY GALILEO DE GUZMAN CASTILLO

33

What Will a Biden Administration Mean for the Climate?

BY DOROTHY GRACE GUERRERO

39

INTRODUCTION

AFTER TRUMP: WHAT SHOULD THE GLOBAL SOUTH EXPECT FROM A BIDEN PRESIDENCY?

BY SHALMALI GUTTAL

The victory of Joseph Biden in the recent US elections was met with relief and hope by liberals and many progressives across the world. Claiming to respond to national interest, President Donald Trump's "America First" foreign and economic policies had placed the US on the path of elite unilateralism—what Nick Serpe so accurately describes as "low minded nationalism under the shadow of imperial decline."

Using Twitter as the principal channel for communicating policy, maligning detractors and conducting public feuds with any

perceived threat to his interests, Trump ran the country as a patriarchal family enterprise, changing senior officials and decisions at whim, and even contradicting his own statements from one day to the next. The issues that the Trump administration was consistent on were hardly commendable: anti-immigration measures that targeted non-white, poor and working-class people; trade wars and strategic turfing with China; demonizing Iran; undercutting Palestinian self-determination; deepening ties with Saudi Arabia; and backing out of multilateral arrangements where the US could not be the top dog.



Donald Trump successfully pandered to white people's fears and anxieties about being overwhelmed by minorities and migrants from the global South. (Creative Commons)

Trump's affinity for authoritarian, unaccountable governance was all too familiar in many Asian countries, where ruling regimes consider democratic processes and institutions as cumbersome though temporarily necessary on the way to establishing complete autocracy. To the extent that his administration engaged with the Asia, Trump single-mindedly sought to contain China's growth and influence.

President Elect Joseph Biden presents different ambitions for the US: ending its isolationist trajectory; restoring US leadership of the so-called "free world" through international strategic, economic, financial, energy and climate fora; rebuilding a domestic economy battered by financial crises and the COVID pandemic; increasing employment; and uniting the country after

four years of divisive, racial politics, and far longer-standing systemic discrimination, racism and violence. As a seasoned politician, Biden speaks with convincing ease about responsible leadership, equality, democratic values, and freedom at home and abroad. His administration's approach to public health and tackling COVID will be especially telling given the alarming spike in infections in the US, and COVID denial encouraged by Donald Trump and many in the Trump administration.

Indians are watching the Trump-Biden transition carefully. Indian progressives cringed at the "Howdy Modi" event in Texas in September 2019 that drew a crowd 50,000 strong, and vigorously protested the "Namaste Trump" tour in India in February this year. There are more than 4.5 million

people of Indian origin living in the US, at least half of whom were born in India and maintain strong relations with their families and communities in India. The Indian diaspora in the US by and large aspires to well-paid professional positions and upper-income brackets, and is enthused by the prospect of a vice president with mixed Indian-Jamaican parentage. Although Kamala Harris has long identified her racial identity as black, African-American and Asian-American, her special mention of her Indian mother during her victory speech on November 7 made headlines in the US and India. Many in India hope that the Biden-Harris team will be a potential deterrent against the downward slide of human rights and democracy in India under the Modi regime.

However, it would be a mistake for progressives in Asia to assume that the Biden presidency would steer the US in a direction that would boost, or even align, with their struggles for justice, human rights, public interest and peace domestically, regionally and globally. The Biden and Trump models of governance may be as different as chalk from cheese, but Biden will still be a US president, and will uphold US economic and geopolitical interests at all costs to ensure a legacy of longevity for the Democratic Party and maintain the myth of US exceptionalism. While Biden may not rush to reinsert the US into global trade deals, there are no signs that US corporations will face deeper, more serious regulation, or that there will be a marked shift away from neoliberalism, given the influence of financial and technology corporations in the Democratic Party.

This compilation of articles is a contribution by Focus on the Global South (Focus) towards discerning what are likely to be the coming Biden administration's policies in key areas so that we can prepare for them. To provide a broad progressive perspective for readers, we requested some of our close colleagues, Nick Serpe, Medea Benjamin, Nicolas Davies and Dorothy Guerrero to contribute to this issue.

In the first essay, *Why Things Will Get Much Worse Before They Get Better for the United States*, Walden Bello contends that owing to very deep polarization in US politics, both domestic and foreign policies will be fought over bitterly, making it difficult for the incoming administration to achieve its foreign policy priorities. The imperative of maintaining "white skin privilege" runs deep among Trump's racially motivated base, which has been whipped up to feel threatened by an invented non-white invasion. In *The Biden Presidency: A Fragile Centrist Interregnum in an Era of Radicalization*, Bello sketches the broader domestic and global forces at play that will make it difficult for Biden to restore the pre-Trump neoliberal "old normal" and argues that the Biden era will be a fragile centrist interregnum in a period of radicalization on both the left and right.

In *Foreign Policy After Trump*, Nick Serpe lays out why the Biden team is predisposed to carry out a New Cold War and lays out the obstacles it faces in pursuing this, including marked shifts in US-Russia relations, US economic interdependence with China and the continuing supremacy of the US dollar in global finance. In *Ten Foreign Policy*

Fiascos Biden Can Start Fixing on Day One, Medea Benjamin and Nicolas Davies propose a list of smoldering foreign policy crises that the Biden team must prioritize in settling, emphasizing the importance of dialing back conflicts, lifting illegal, life-threatening sanctions, protecting civilian lives everywhere and proactively promoting real peace and justice.

Walden Bello delineates what the Biden administration has in store for the Asia-Pacific region and emphasizes the continuity between Trump and Biden in prioritizing containing China in *What Will a Biden Presidency Bring to the Asia Pacific? In Uncertainties and Contradictions: Implications of a Biden Presidency for Philippines-US Relations*, Galileo Guzman Castillo explores the implications of a Biden presidency for US-Philippines relations, and the extent to which Biden can remain true to his stated intent of returning democratic values to the heart of US foreign policy while still maintaining normal diplomatic relations with regimes that routinely abuse in human rights.

Finally, in *What will a Biden administration mean for the climate?*, Dorothy Guerrero argues that Biden will bring the US back as a serious actor in climate politics, but numerous contradictions and obstacles will prevent the administration from taking the urgent actions needed to radically reduce carbon emissions.

Reclaiming US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region is likely to be an important economic and strategic priority for Biden and Harris. At the same time, the impacts of the Biden presidency in the region will depend considerably on economic, foreign and strategic policies and positions taken by Asia-Pacific governments themselves, domestically, regionally and globally. Focus will continue to monitor these developments and share progressive analyses about them in the coming years.

SHALMALI GUTTAL is the executive director of Focus on the Global South.

WHY THINGS WILL GET MUCH WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER FOR THE UNITED STATES

For many, Trump's ouster is a relief. But his steadfast support among white voters puts his party on a crash course with democracy.

BY WALDEN BELLO

I'm one of those kibitzers who supported Joe Biden reluctantly from a distance, mainly because I felt that for both the US and the world, he was the lesser evil. And like many, I breathed a sigh of relief when Biden crossed the 270 electoral vote marker.

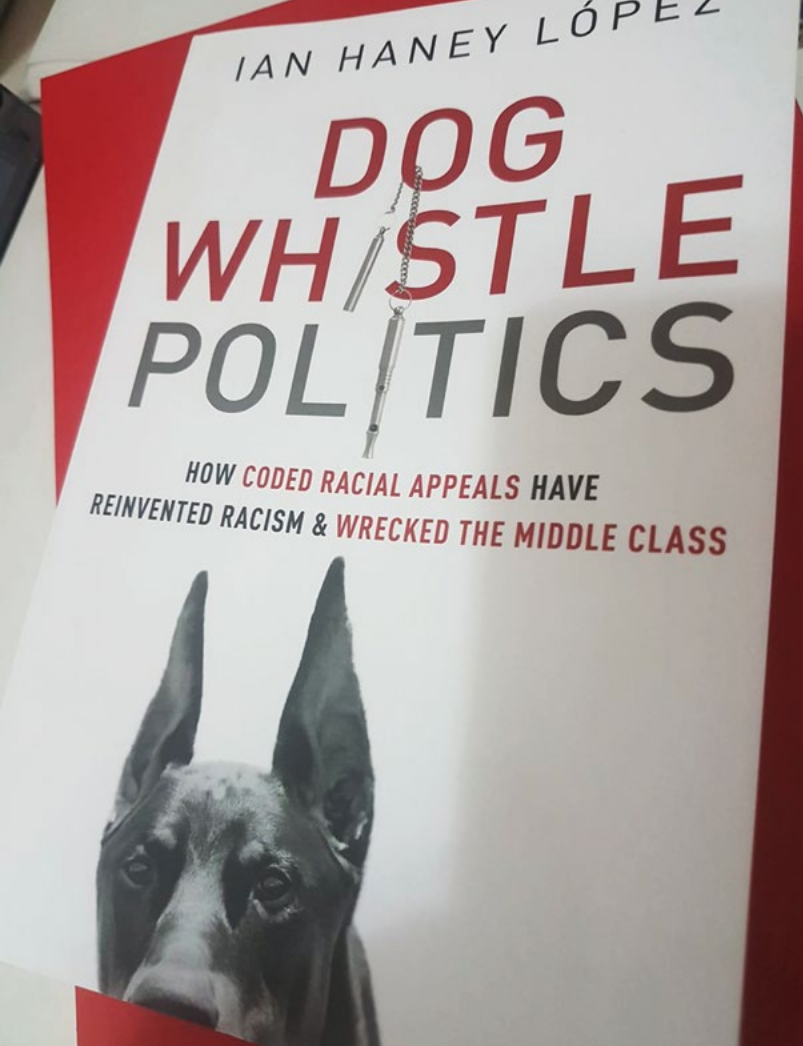
Then the political sociologist in me took over as I looked at the electoral breakdown by race.

Trump's White Electoral Fortress

Whites make up around over 65 per cent of the electorate of the US. Surveys show that 57

per cent of white voters (56 per cent women, 58 per cent men) went for Trump, despite everything—his awful mismanagement of the pandemic, his lies, his anti-science attitude, his divisiveness, and his blatant pandering to white nationalist groups like the Nazis, Klan, and Proud Boys.

The electoral coalition that was behind Biden's win was a minority of whites (42 per cent, most likely the people with more years in school), the vast majority of Black voters (87 per cent), and a big majority of Latinx voters (66 per cent) and Asian American voters (63 per cent). Trump's support among whites was essentially the same as in 2016,



“Dog-whistling”, or calling forth racist responses with coded racist appeals have become a staple of Republican Party politics since the 1970s, leading to the GOP’s becoming a virtually all-white party. (Walden Bello)

with that of women rising to make up for a slight decline in that of men. White solidarity continues to be disturbingly strong, and, more than opposition to taxes, opposition of abortion, and unqualified defense of the market, it is now the defining ideology of the Republican Party.

How did the party of Abraham Lincoln, author of the Emancipation Proclamation, become so completely opposite to what he stood for?

The Republican Race-Driven Evolution from Nixon to Trump

Over the last five decades the key feature of US politics has been the unfolding of a largely race-driven counterrevolution against progressive and liberal politics.

The year 1972, when Richard Nixon beat George McGovern for the presidency, was a watershed, since it marked the success of the Republicans’ “Southern Strategy,” where Nixon’s aim had been to detach the American South from the Democratic Party and place it securely in the Republican camp owing to the Democrats’ moving to embrace--albeit haltingly--the civil rights of Black people.

From 1972, the racist colonization of the Republican Party steadily progressed, reaching a first peak with Ronald Reagan, president from 1981 to 1989, whose extremely effective “dog-whistle” was the “welfare queen,” which whites decoded into “Black woman with lots of children dependent on state support.” His successor, George H.W. Bush, memorably owed his election to his playing up the charge that his opponent

Michael Dukakis, owing to a prison furlough bill the latter had supported as governor of Massachusetts, was “responsible” for a Black man, Willie Horton, going on a weekend leave from which he did not return and went on instead to commit other crimes.

This does not mean, of course, that people flocking to the Republicans during this period did not have other reasons for doing so, like opposition to abortion and to tax increases. There were a variety of reasons, but the central driver of this political migration was racism.

That racist Republican base, the majority of whom still believed as late as December 1917 that former President Obama had been born in Kenya, was the key factor that catapulted Trump to the presidency in 2016, though Obama’s pro-free trade policies also played a crucial role in costing Hillary Clinton the elections among the white working class in the deindustrialized mid-west states.

The Extra-Electoral Mobilization of Trump’s Base

What Trump has managed over the last few years as president is not so much to transform an already racially polarized electoral arena but to mobilize his racist base extra-electorally, combining dog-whistle race-coded language with rhetorical attacks on “Big Tech” and “Wall Street” (and on the latter, it’s just a matter of time before his followers will start zeroing in on the immigrant Indian roots of some very visible members of Silicon Valley and Wall Street’s elites like Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and former Citigroup chief Vikram Pandit.)

That is where the danger lies now: the fascist mobilization of a white population that is in relative decline numbers-wise. History has shown that when large social groups no longer feel they can win by democratic elections, the temptation towards extra-parliamentary solutions becomes very tempting. As the minority population in the US moves toward parity in numbers with the white population in the next few decades, white nationalism is likely to become more rather than less popular among whites of all ages and across gender lines.

Why Republican Leaders Don’t Tell Trump to Concede

Many people are wondering why Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and most other Republican top dogs don’t want to tell Trump to concede though they most likely know his claims of fraud are bogus. The reason is that they know very well that if they do, Trump’s base would turn against them, endangering their current and future ambitions. This just goes to show how much Trump and his base have converted the Republican Party into a pliable political instrument, with a leader-base relationship much like the Nazi Party in the Germany of the 1930’s. In fact, Trump is as much a creation of his base as he is creator of that base. What liberal commentators do not understand is that it is not not only a case of Trump whipping up his base for his personal political ends. *It is that, but it is much more: that base wants Trump to lie for them and cheat for them and go to hell for them, and if Trump were to stick to the conventions of the transition process, he himself would run the risk of being disowned by them.*

I HATE TO SPELL THIS OUT BUT THE CURRENT MOOD IN THE US APPROXIMATES THAT OF CIVIL WAR, AND IT MAY JUST BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE ONE SIDE, THE TRUMP FORCES, TRANSLATES THAT MOOD INTO SOMETHING MORE THREATENING, MORE UGLY.

For Trump's people, what is at stake is the maintenance of white skin privilege, the enduring material and ideological legacy of the genocide of Native Americans and enslavement of African Americans that are among the key foundational elements of the United States of America. Just as the South was willing to stake everything on the roll of the dice of secession in 1861, a very large part, perhaps the majority of the Republican base, is probably now willing to resort to extra-parliamentary means to stop the tide of equal rights and equal justice for all.

In this connection, the armed pro-Trump convoys that paraded against Black Lives Matter in Portland in September and the

armed band that showed up to intimidate electoral workers counting the votes in Maricopa County, Arizona, on election night may not be aberrations but a taste of things to come.

The Republicans' Post-Electoral Strategy

It is now evident that the Republicans' emerging strategy is to refuse any formal concession on Trump's part and boycott the inaugural ceremonies, then mobilize against the Biden administration as "illegitimate," paralyzing it over the next four years. I hate to spell this out but the current mood in the US approximates that of civil war, and it may just be a matter of time before one side, the Trump forces, translates that mood into something more threatening, more ugly.

1860 All Over Again?

Can Biden's victory be the equivalent of Lincoln's in the elections of 1860 which led the vast majority of the White South to support the secession spearheaded by the slave-owning aristocracy? Lincoln's words unfortunately ring true today as they did then: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

WALDEN BELLO is Adjunct Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Part of his book *Counterrevolution: The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishers, 2019), discusses the social roots of Trumpism.

THE BIDEN PRESIDENCY: A FRAGILE CENTRIST INTERREGNUM IN AN ERA OF RADICALIZATION

Hewing to its centrist instincts will be a disaster for the Biden administration. The left must seize the initiative.

BY WALDEN BELLO

Donald Trump embarked on an unorthodox course in economic policy that combined tax cuts for the rich with a protectionist trade policy that was ostensibly aimed at saving the US's industrial base and preventing the export of American jobs. The question is not if the incoming Biden administration will follow, in reaction, a centrist, more orthodox course. It will. The question is, will such a course be successful?

There is no doubt that, especially with so many neoliberals and neoconservatives deserting Trump and the Republican Party and supporting Biden in the lead-up to the elections and with the people surrounding

Biden coming mainly from the Clinton-Obama wing of the Democratic Party that is friendly with High Finance and Big Tech, a Biden presidency will hew to the center in its political economic approach.

Trade and Taxes

After Trump's offensive on free trade, the Biden team will push to recharge globalization, but since neoliberalism has such a bad name, it will probably do this cautiously, calling off the trade war with China but refraining from pushing new trade agreements, being sensitive to the

frustrations of the white working class that had deserted Hillary Clinton in the deindustrialized mid-western states in 2016 and barely supported Biden this time around.

There will be no more tax cutting for the rich, but bringing back the pre-Reagan era high marginal tax rates on the highest incomes won't happen. Social policy will focus mainly on expanding safety nets for the middle and lower classes rather than pushing for higher wages for workers via significantly higher minimum wages and political support for more aggressive union organizing. Improvements in social safety nets will, of course, largely depend on what level of tax increases the rich backers of the Democratic Party and party centrists under pressure from the party's left will agree on.

Yellen and Wall Street

While Biden's pick as director of the Office of Management and Budget, Neera Tanden, has received criticism from progressives for her previous support for social security cuts, former Federal Reserve Board Chair Janet Yellen has been given a free pass by the left when Biden named her as his Treasury Secretary. Yet it is Yellen who is the more consequential and worrisome appointment. That the Dow and the S&P rallied at the announcement is not surprising since as Fed Chair, she continued Ben Bernanke's policies of quantitative easing, or buying the big banks' toxic assets both to keep them afloat and use them to infuse money into the economy in order to ward off a recession.

Biden's top Wall Street donors

Top 20 in 2020 cycle, including both campaign and outside groups

Name	Organization	Total
Donald Sussman	Paloma Partners	\$9.0M
James Simons	Euclidean Capital	\$7.0M
Jessica Livingston	Y Combinator	\$5.0M
Henry and Marsha Laufer	Renaissance Technologies	\$4.2M
Michael Moritz	Sequoia Capital	\$3.5M
Seth Klarman	Baupost Group	\$3.0M
Joshua Bekenstein	Bain Capital	\$2.8M
Susan Mandel	Lone Pine Capital	\$2.6M
Vinod Khosla	Khosla Ventures	\$1.5M
Jay Robert (JB) Pritzker	Pritzker Group	\$1.5M
Michael Sacks	Grosvenor Capital Management	\$1.5M
John Pritzker	Geolo Capital	\$1.2M
Reid Hoffman	Greylock Partners	\$1.1M
Yaron Minsky	Jane Street Capital	\$1.0M
Richard Blum	Blum Capital Partners	\$1.0M
Gregory Jensen	Bridgewater Assoc	\$1.0M
Daniel Abraham	Beach Point Capital Management	\$1.0M
Ronald Conway	SV Angel LLC	\$0.7M
Robert Granieri	Jane Street Capital	\$0.6M
Daniel Tierney	Wicklow Capital	\$0.5M

SOURCE: Center for Responsive Politics. These totals include contributions made by any spouses or dependents to the campaign committees and outside groups.



Joe Biden raised much more money from Wall Street than Donald Trump during the 2020 presidential campaign. (<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/10/28/wall-street-spends-74-million-to-support-joe-biden.html>)

A CENTRIST ECONOMIC POLICY WILL SOFTEN THE HARD EDGES OF NEOLIBERALISM LARGELY VIA KEYNESIAN MONETARY MANIPULATION BUT NOT DISSIPATE THE OVERRIDING NEOLIBERAL POLICY ORIENTATION CARRIED BY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ESTABLISHMENT SINCE MAINTAINING THE PROFITABILITY OF US CAPITALISM WILL BE A CENTRAL CONCERN OF BIDEN'S ECONOMIC PRAGMATISTS, OWING PARTLY TO THE INFLUENCE OF BIG TECH AND WALL STREET ON THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ESTABLISHMENT.

Fox News said "Wall Street Loves Janet Yellen" since she represents "easy money" for the banks, with one commentator also saying, "It's a sign there won't be anything extreme." For both High Finance and Big Tech, Yellen's being appointed instead of Elizabeth Warren is a sign that Biden has no intention to carry out a serious effort to regulate them beyond the weak Obama-era Dodd-Frank legislation.

In sum, a centrist economic policy will soften the hard edges of neoliberalism largely via Keynesian monetary manipulation but not dissipate the overriding neoliberal policy orientation carried by the Democratic Party establishment since maintaining the profitability of US capitalism will be a central concern of Biden's economic pragmatists, owing partly to the influence of Big Tech and Wall Street on the Democratic Party establishment.

Convergence of Elites

But beyond the question of influence of special interests on the Democratic Party, however, is a deeper phenomenon of *convergence of interests and ideology* between what Thomas Piketty calls, borrowing a term from the Indian caste system, the highly educated "Brahmin Left" and the "Merchant Right." It is worth quoting Piketty in full in this regard:

"[T]he Clinton and Obama administrations basically validated and perpetuated the basic thrust of policy under Reagan. This may be because both Democratic presidents...were partly convinced by the Reagan narrative. But it is

may also be that acceptance of the new fiscal and social agenda was partly due the transformation of the Democratic electorate and to a political and strategic choice to rely more heavily on the party's new and highly educated supporters, who may have found the turn toward less redistributive policies personally advantageous."

In other words, the Brahmin Left, which is what Democratic Party had become by the period 1990-2020, basically shares common interests with the Merchant Right, to use Piketty's terms. The latter had ruled via the Republican Party from Reagan to George W. Bush but key sectors of it have become increasingly disenchanted with Trump's Wall Street-hating nationalist mass base to which he has assiduously pandered.

Trump's attributing his defeat to Big Tech and Wall Street was a wild conspiracy theory but there was a grain of truth in his ravings: that the Democratic candidate and his party have enjoyed significant support, both material and ideological, from the highly educated Silicon Valley elite and the highly educated Wall Street elite and the technocratic professional classes as a whole. This was the force that allowed Biden to leave Trump in the dust in terms of fundraising throughout the campaign.

An Unstable Center

But as Marx said, history first occurs as tragedy, then as farce. Owing to the erosion of the credibility of globalization and

neoliberalism, the return to an anachronistic orthodox centrism is not likely to hold and will serve at best as an extremely unstable, short-lived interregnum amidst deepening polarization between left and right.

In this struggle, the far right is, at this point, far more united politically and ideologically than the left under the leadership of a charismatic personality who, while he lost the elections, will continue to be the dominant figure in Republican Party politics in the Biden era. Trump's heated mass base and traditional Republican conservatives will combine to make even pallid technocratic centrist initiatives, like Bernanke-Yellen's quantitative easing, very difficult to push through. The coming Biden era may well be a mere interregnum in a political trajectory of the far right's rise to power.

Or it can be the antechamber to a new era in progressive politics, an outcome that will depend on whether the left can mobilize the Democratic Party base of workers and minorities to seize the initiative from a momentarily hegemonic party center devoid of both ideas and courage to break with the past, though it will have an Everest to climb in winning over the middle class and a large portion of the white working class that have been seduced by the siren song of Trumpism.

WALDEN BELLO is the co-founder of and current senior analyst at the Bangkok-based Focus on the Global South and the International Adjunct Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

FOREIGN POLICY AFTER TRUMP

Biden promises to restore the US's standing in the world, but times have changed.

FROM DISSENT

BY NICK SERPE

During the 2016 presidential primary, Donald Trump distinguished himself from his opponents by stepping outside the boundaries of acceptable opinion on national security and foreign policy. "It's one of the worst decisions in the history of the country," he said of the Iraq War. "We have totally destabilized the Middle East." (In typical family-first fashion, he credited the error to George W. Bush "being loyal to the father.") The other Republican candidates clambered over one another to profess their outrage at Trump's statement, but as was so often the case, he had read the room better than them. Large numbers of Republican voters had retreated from the confident jingoism of the 2000s into bitter laments for better days.

For some hoping to break apart the foreign policy consensus, this shift signaled an opening for a long-promised coalition of convenience: isolationists and anti-imperialists against the war machine. These hopes were

further ignited by the hawkish credentials of Hillary Clinton, behind whom much of the defense establishment lined up—the deep state of Trump's fevered dreams.

But if he was dovish on the war on terror, Trump amped up the aggression on other fronts. Central Americans and Mexicans were cast as literal invaders; Trump's ugly anti-immigrant politics were foundational to his whole campaign. He also promised a fiery realization of the Obama era's incomplete "pivot to Asia," with explicit focus on the threat posed by China, as represented in trade imbalances and the long-term migration of industrial jobs. "We can't continue to allow China to rape our country, and that's what they're doing," he said at a rally in May 2016. "It's the greatest theft in the history of the world."

There was a through line in this assemblage of positions—less Trump Doctrine than Trump



Then Vice President Joe Biden toasts Chinese President Xi Jin Ping at a US State Department luncheon in September 2015. The US-China relationship will be the no. 1 foreign policy concern of the incoming administration. (Wikimedia Commons)

Mindset: *somebody's getting screwed, but it's not going to be us.* It was a mantra for a low-minded nationalism under the looming shadow of imperial decline.

In office, Trump pursued his zero-sum deal-making to mixed effect. Many of his Defense Department staff were characters in the usual range from defense centrist to unreconstructed neocon, and the administration didn't undertake any major changes to military spending or operations. His trade warfare broke with recent orthodoxy but was far from an embrace of pre-neoliberal "protectionism"; as others have pointed out, the most direct precedent for Trump's China strategy was the Reagan administration's attempts to bully Japan to abandon industrial and trade policies it felt unfairly disadvantaged the United States.

Trump's immigration policies, by contrast, were notably horrific. While we can accurately characterize new miseries imposed on migrants from Central America as an extension of a longer-term border militarization, or the "Muslim ban" as the outcome of years of Islamophobic public rhetoric and the less discussed but equally arbitrary post-9/11 no-fly list, the Trump era marked a new and cruel apotheosis of American nativism, which did real harm to non-citizens living in or attempting to come to the United States.

Undergirding these foreign policy trends was Trump's instinctual anti-multilateralism and reliance on personal judgments on the character of foreign leaders, acquired from decades spent in the petty-authoritarian family-capitalist milieu of real estate. He

withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement. He reneged on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. That decision, along with the authorization of the assassination of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, seemed to precipitate in large part from Trump's ties with Israeli leadership (fostered, again typically, by son-in-law Jared Kushner) and members of the Saudi royal family. Trump's affinity for "strongmen" at times seemed proto-political: their projection of strength and ability to silence opponents represented a buried, unrealizable aspiration for someone like Trump—blabbering, feckless, and constantly mocked.

Trump's patrimonial politics made minor inroads into the function of the modern American state, but they cannot outlast his term in office. The real test for his brand of post-American Century nationalism would rest on the capabilities of a future executive branch command cut from the same political cloth but more adept at bureaucratic maneuvering and more conscious of its goals.

This is not the future Joe Biden wants. The Democratic president-elect promises a restoration of American standing: hegemony maintained through the steady stewardship of international institutions that can overcome coordination problems and bring shared global prosperity. Biden speaks the idiom of benevolent American leadership with the rote ease of someone who has been in this game long before the Cold War ended.

But the times have changed, and not just because of the Trump disruption effect. The global growth machine is slowing,

while climate change is accelerating, contributing to greater migration flows of desperate people that show no signs of abating. In Europe, heads of state publicly welcome Biden as a return to norms—which means, among other things, that the U.S. government might stop demanding they increase their financial commitments to NATO—while simultaneously entertaining ideas of "strategic autonomy." In the Middle East, the stated U.S. goal is drawdown. Biden claims a desire to end the "forever wars" (a term that has moved from the antiwar margins to the policy mainstream) but seems likely to continue supporting special-ops expeditionary forces and drone warfare—the high-tech route to military preponderance at a time when the American public is less willing than ever to die for their country.

The antagonistic external focus of the United States has shifted definitively, however, to China—a process initiated under Obama and heightened under Trump, but which has as much to do with the course charted by the Chinese Communist Party under Xi Jinping as any U.S. initiative. Biden, who spent multiple days with Xi in China in 2011 and played host to the general secretary on a friendly trip to the United States in 2012, called Xi a "thug" in February and made chauvinistic statements about Chinese responsibility for COVID-19 during the campaign. By some accounts, his administration will be slow to wind down any punitive Trump-era tariffs, even though there are no current plans to revive a strategic anti-Chinese trade bloc of the sort promised by the aborted Trans-Pacific Partnership. On the campaign trail in 2019, Biden said China was "not competition for us," but there is a whiff of Sputnik-era anxiety in the air, including in

mundane but crucial areas like China's goal to set new technological standards, at a moment of U.S. policy paralysis.

If, as is widely expected, Biden picks Michèle Flournoy to be defense secretary in the incoming administration, the choice will reflect this shift in focus. Flournoy co-authored a paper earlier this year with the Center for a New American Security (a think tank she cofounded in 2007) that details the domestic investments, technological advancements, and military preparations necessary to prevent further Chinese economic and territorial expansion. The paper gives fine-grained description of how the United States can prevail in open military conflict with China (chilling less because it is a likely outcome in the short term than because it provides insight into the dark martial imaginings of the war-gaming national security elite). Flournoy proposes a major overhaul in defense spending priorities. Believe it when you see it. Many a military modernization plan in the United States has died in the face of interlocking defense contractors with strong congressional support and siloed military leadership reluctant to give up pet projects under their command.

The willingness of the Biden administration to rush headlong into that "New Cold War" we have heard so much about will be dampened by entanglements with no historical parallel in U.S.–Soviet relations: interconnected corporate production supply chains, Chinese ownership of U.S. sovereign debt, and a large American market for Chinese goods. Moreover, the U.S. dollar remains the global reserve currency in the absence of any plausible alternative; the Federal Reserve's activities during the

COVID-19 crisis have only deepened dollar supremacy, much as they did during the 2008–2009 financial crisis. Indications of decoupling in any of these domains remain preliminary, and U.S. global-financial hegemony continues to structure both domestic and international political economy. But it seems safe to assume that Xi's China has longer-term goals to become, if not the indispensable nation, then one that dictates more than it reacts to the dictates of others—not least on issues like the brutal repression in Xinjiang and Hong Kong—while the United States no longer possesses either state or capitalist capacity for long-term planning at all.

Pankaj Mishra recently wrote in the *New York Review of Books* that "understanding the contemporary world requires a truly global perspective.... It means forsaking the whole structure of preconceptions on which a parochial West-centric view has long been based." This short essay has many omissions on this count, and barely scratches the surface elsewhere. For American leftists who believe in freedom and democracy and came up in a country that professed its commitment to those goals while frequently denying them to the majority of the world, Mishra's statement presents an ethical and intellectual challenge. But it is a task made slightly easier by the many recent signs that U.S. hegemony, while not yet dead, will not last forever. The cracks are growing. Our continued responsibility is to build solidarity among the people ill-served by our failing state in ways that do not foreclose solidarity with people beyond it.

NICK SERPE is *Dissent's* senior editor.

TEN FOREIGN POLICY FIASCOS BIDEN CAN START FIXING ON DAY ONE

Biden can immediately reverse some of Trump's most disastrous decisions. And each one can set the stage for broader progressive foreign policy initiatives.

FROM FOREIGN POLICY IN FOCUS

BY MEDEA BENJAMIN AND NICOLAS J.S. DAVIES

Donald Trump loves executive orders as a tool of dictatorial power, avoiding the need to work through Congress. But that works both ways, making it relatively easy for President-elect, which we have also outlined.

1. End the U.S. role in the Saudi-led war on Yemen and restore U.S. humanitarian aid to Yemen.

Congress already passed a War Powers Resolution to end the U.S. role in the

Yemen war, but Trump vetoed it, prioritizing war machine profits and a cozy relationship with the horrific Saudi dictatorship. Biden should immediately issue an executive order to end every aspect of the U.S. role in the war, based on the resolution that Trump vetoed.

The U.S. should also accept its share of responsibility for what many have called the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today, and provide Yemen with funding to

feed its people, restore its health care system, and eventually rebuild this devastated country.

Biden should restore and expand USAID funding and recommit U.S. financial support to the UN, the WHO, and to World Food Program relief programs in Yemen.

2. Suspend all U.S. arms sales and transfers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Both countries are responsible for massacring civilians in Yemen, and the UAE is reportedly the largest arms supplier to General Haftar's

rebel forces in Libya. Congress passed bills to suspend arms sales to both of them, but Trump vetoed them too. Then he struck arms deals worth \$24 billion with the UAE as part of an obscene military and commercial ménage à trois between the U.S., the UAE, and Israel, which he absurdly tried to pass off as a peace agreement.

While mostly ignored at the behest of the weapons companies, there are actually U.S. laws that require the suspension of arms transfers to countries that use them to violate U.S. and international law. They include the Leahy Law that prohibits the U.S. from providing military assistance to foreign security forces that commit gross violations of



The Saudi air war in Southern Yemen, carried out with US weaponry, has created a massive humanitarian crisis in that country. Stopping US aid to Saudi Arabia should be one of the incoming US president's priorities. (Mohammed Mohammed/Xinhua News Agency/PA)

human rights, and the Arms Export Control Act, which states that countries must use imported U.S. weapons only for legitimate self-defense.

Once these suspensions are in place, the Biden administration should seriously review the legality of Trump's arms sales to both countries, with a view to canceling them and banning future sales. Biden should commit to applying these laws consistently and uniformly to all U.S. military aid and arms sales, without making exceptions for Israel, Egypt, or other U.S. allies.

3. Rejoin the Iran Nuclear Agreement (JCPOA) and lift sanctions on Iran.

After renegeing on the JCPOA, Trump slapped draconian sanctions on Iran, brought us to the brink of war by killing its top general, and is even trying to order up illegal, aggressive war plans in his last days as president. The Biden administration will face an uphill battle undoing this web of hostile actions and the deep mistrust they have caused, so Biden must act decisively to restore mutual trust: immediately rejoin the JCPOA, lift the sanctions, and stop blocking the \$5 billion IMF loan that Iran desperately needs to deal with the COVID crisis.

In the longer term, the U.S. should give up the idea of regime change in Iran—this is for the people of Iran to decide—and instead restore diplomatic relations and start working with Iran to deescalate other Middle East conflicts, from Lebanon to Syria to Afghanistan, where cooperation with Iran is essential.

4. End U.S. threats and sanctions against officials of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Nothing so brazenly embodies the U.S. government's enduring, bipartisan disdain for international law as its failure to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). If President Biden is serious about recommitting the U.S. to the rule of law, he should submit the Rome Statute to the U.S. Senate for ratification to join 120 other countries as members of the ICC. The Biden administration should also accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which the U.S. rejected after the Court convicted the U.S. of aggression and ordered it to pay reparations to Nicaragua in 1986.

5. Back President Moon's diplomacy for a "permanent peace regime" in Korea.

President-elect Biden has reportedly agreed to meet South Korea's President Moon Jae-in soon after he is sworn in. Trump's failure to provide sanctions relief and explicit security guarantees to North Korea doomed his diplomacy and became an obstacle to the diplomatic process under way between Korean presidents Moon and Kim.

The Biden administration must start negotiating a peace agreement to formally end the Korean war, and initiate confidence-building measures such as opening liaison offices, easing sanctions, facilitating reunions between Korean American and North Korean families and halting U.S.-South Korea military

exercises. Negotiations must involve concrete commitments to non-aggression from the U.S. side to pave the way for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and the reconciliation that so many Koreans desire—and deserve.

6. Renew New START with Russia and freeze the U.S.'s trillion-dollar new nuke plan.

Biden can end Trump's dangerous game of brinkmanship on day one and commit to renewing Obama's New START Treaty with Russia, which freezes both countries' nuclear arsenals at 1,550 deployed warheads each. He can also freeze Obama and Trump's plan to spend more than a trillion dollars on a new generation of U.S. nuclear weapons.

Biden should also adopt a long overdue "no first use" nuclear weapons policy, but most of the world is ready to go much further. In 2017, 122 countries voted for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) at the UN General Assembly. None of the current nuclear weapons states voted for or against the treaty, essentially pretending to ignore it. On October 24, 2020, Honduras became the 50th country to ratify the treaty, which will now go into effect on January 22, 2021.

So, here is a visionary challenge for President Biden for that day, his second full day in office: Invite the leaders of each of the other eight nuclear weapons states to a conference to negotiate how all nine nuclear weapons states will sign onto the TPNW, eliminate their nuclear weapons and remove this existential danger hanging over every human being on Earth.

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7. Lift illegal unilateral U.S. sanctions against other countries.

Economic sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council are generally considered legal under international law and require action by the Security Council to impose or lift them. But unilateral economic sanctions that deprive ordinary people of necessities like food and medicine are illegal and cause grave harm to innocent citizens.

U.S. sanctions on countries like Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, and Syria are a form of economic warfare. UN special rapporteurs have condemned them as crimes against humanity and compared them to medieval sieges. Since most of these sanctions were imposed by executive order, President Biden can lift them the same way on Day One.

In the longer term, unilateral sanctions that affect an entire population are a form of coercion, like military intervention, coups, and covert operations, that have no place in a legitimate foreign policy based on diplomacy, the rule of law and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

8. Roll back Trump policies on Cuba and move to normalize relations.

Over the past four years, the Trump administration overturned the progress towards normal relations made by President Obama, sanctioning Cuba's tourism and energy industries, blocking coronavirus aid shipments, restricting remittances to family

members and sabotaging Cuba's international medical missions, which are a major source of income for its health system.

President Biden should start working with the Cuban government to allow the return of diplomats to their respective embassies, lift all restrictions on remittances, remove Cuba from the list of countries that are not U.S. partners against terrorism, cancel the portion of the Helms Burton Act (Title III) that allows Americans to sue companies that use property seized by the Cuban government 60 years ago, and collaborate with Cuban health professionals in the fight against COVID-19.

These measures would mark a down payment on a new era of diplomacy and cooperation, as long as they don't fall victim to crass attempts to gain conservative Cuban American votes in the next election, which Biden and politicians of both parties should commit to resisting.

9. Restore pre-2015 rules of engagement to spare civilian lives.

In the fall of 2015, as U.S. forces escalated their bombing of ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria to over 100 bomb and missile strikes per day, the Obama administration loosened military rules of engagement to let U.S. commanders in the Middle East order airstrikes that were expected to kill up to 10 civilians without prior approval from Washington.

Trump reportedly loosened the rules even further, but details were not made public. Iraqi Kurdish intelligence reports counted 40,000 civilians killed in the assault on Mosul

alone. Biden can reset these rules and start killing fewer civilians on day one.

But we can avoid these tragic civilian deaths altogether by ending these wars. Democrats have been critical of Trump's often ad hoc pronouncements about withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia.

President Biden now has the chance to truly end these wars. He should set a date, no later than the end of December 2021, by when all U.S. troops will come home from all these combat zones. This policy may not be popular among war profiteers, but it would certainly be popular among Americans across the ideological spectrum.

10. Freeze U.S. military spending, and launch a major initiative to reduce it.

At the end of the Cold War, former senior Pentagon officials told the Senate Budget Committee that U.S. military spending could safely be cut by half over the next 10 years. That goal was never achieved, and the promised peace dividend gave way to a triumphalist "power dividend."

The military-industrial complex exploited the crimes of September 11, 2001, to justify an extraordinary one-sided arms race in which the U.S. accounted for 45 percent of global military spending from 2003 to 2011, far outstripping its peak Cold War military spending. The military-industrial complex

is counting on Biden to escalate a renewed Cold War with Russia and China as the only plausible pretext for continuing these record military budgets.

Biden must dial back the conflicts with China and Russia, and instead begin the critical task of moving money from the Pentagon to urgent domestic needs. He should start with the 10 percent cut supported this year by 93 representatives and 23 senators.

In the longer term, Biden should look for deeper cuts in Pentagon spending, as in Representative Barbara Lee's bill to cut \$350 billion per year from the U.S. military budget, approximating the 50 percent peace dividend we were promised after the Cold War and freeing up resources we sorely need to invest in healthcare, education, clean energy and modern infrastructure.

MEDEA BENJAMIN is the cofounder of CODEPINK for Peace, and the author of several books, including *Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the US-Saudi Connection* and *Inside Iran: the Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*.

NICOLAS J. S. DAVIES is an independent journalist, a researcher with CODEPINK, and the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*.

WHAT WILL A BIDEN PRESIDENCY BRING TO THE ASIA PACIFIC?

Assuming Joe Biden will take the reins of the presidency on January 20, 2021, what will his likely policies toward the Asia-Pacific region look like?

BY WALDEN BELLO

Biden administration will drop trade war...

It is unlikely that Biden will continue the trade war with China. That would simply be too destabilizing for everyone. Not only is the US greatly dependent on China for so many of its industrial imports, but so many countries are dependent on China as a market for their exports. This is not only for raw materials and agricultural goods, as in the case of Africa and Latin America, respectively, but also industrial goods, as in the case of Southeast Asia, which manufactures components that are shipped to China, assembled there, then sent to the US, Europe, and everywhere else.

...but maintain Trump's strategic posture towards China

However, it is important to point out that the Biden group share the Trump people's view of China as the US's main strategic competitor. Their negative views on China's industrial policy are not that much different from those found in that 2017 White House report on the crisis of US manufacturing authored by Trump adviser Peter Navarro. They share the same view that China is advancing by poaching US intellectual property and are prepared to take measures to prevent China from gaining a technological edge.



The USS Ronald Reagan is the offensive core of the forward-deployed Seventh Fleet. (Wikimedia Commons)

In this connection, one must realize that it was not Trump that designated China as the US's main competitor. That process started with George W. Bush, under whom China was re-designated from being a "strategic partner" to being a "strategic competitor." Bush, however, did not follow through with concrete anti-China policies since he wanted to cultivate China as an ally in the so-called War on Terror. But Obama did, on the strategic front, with his "Pivot to Asia," where the bulk of US naval forces were repositioned to "contain" China. In a way, one can say that Trump merely radicalized Obama's posture toward China.

Continuity in military strategy from Trump to Biden

Moreover, there is an institutional presence in the region that has remained very consistent through various presidents, Republican or Democrat, and that is the US military. The military plays a much, much bigger role in formulating policy in the Asia Pacific than in other parts of the world. Even as US corporations embraced China because it offered cheap labor that enhanced their profitability, the Pentagon was always skeptical of better relations with Beijing and it

THE STATUS OF BOTH SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN AS US SATELLITES WILL BE UNCHANGED UNDER A BIDEN PRESIDENCY. THEY REALLY HAVE NO CHOICE, BEING MILITARILY OCCUPIED COUNTRIES. WITH JAPAN HOSTING 25 MAJOR US MILITARY BASES AND KOREA 15, PLUS SCORES OF SMALLER MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, THESE TWO COUNTRIES SERVE AS THE PENTAGON'S PRINCIPAL SPRINGBOARD FOR THE CONTAINMENT OF CHINA.

led in developing the opposite view of China as a strategic rival.

It must be pointed out that the operative warfighting doctrine of the Pentagon is AirSea Battle, and it is clear that China is the "enemy" and the overriding objective here is, in case of war, penetrating the A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) defenses of China in order to deliver a lethal blow on the latter's industrial infrastructure in Southeastern China.

Under Trump, two major moves favored by the Pentagon were made: the installation of an anti-missile defense system (THAAD) directed at both China and North Korea in South Korea and the redeployment in the Asia Pacific of intermediate range nuclear missiles aimed at China after the US withdrew from the INF (Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty in 2019.

The Pentagon defines China as a "near peer competitor," but it knows it is far from being one. The US outspends China three to one, some \$650 billion to \$250 billion (as of 2018). China has only some 260 nuclear warheads, compared to the US's 5400, and its ICBM's (intercontinental ballistic missiles) are dated, though they are undergoing modernization. China's offensive naval capability is minuscule compared to the US's; it has two Soviet era aircraft carriers, while the US has 11 carrier task force groups and has introduced the state-of-the-art carrier, the USS Gerald Ford. China has only one overseas base—and this is in Djibouti in the Middle East-- while the US has hundreds of bases and installations surrounding China, in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, and a mobile floating base in the form of the Seventh Fleet that

dominates the South China Sea. Even if it chooses to challenge the US militarily—which is a big “if”—Beijing won’t be able to significantly do so until after a few more decades.

The Pentagon’s grand strategic objective, which will be unchanged under a Biden administration, will be to halt China way before it reaches strategic parity.

Biden, Xi, and the South China Sea

Given this, the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea will continue to be a site of intense naval confrontation between China and the US, and between China with the ASEAN countries whose just claims to exclusive economic zones and territories Beijing has ignored. Vietnamese officials, for instance, have been very vocal about their fears that the level of tension is such that a mere ship collision can escalate into a higher form of conflict, like a limited conventional war since there are no rules or understandings that govern military relationships except a volatile balance of power; and everyone knows what volatile balance of power situations can lead to, the European balance before World War I being a worrisome lesson in this regard.

In this connection, demilitarization and denuclearization of the South China Sea are the real answer to the escalation of tensions in the area, and ASEAN governments and civil society should be pushing this alternative more energetically. It is, however, unlikely that as of now, China or the US under Biden would be open to this alternative.

A return to the Cold War in the Korean peninsula?

In terms of differences between Trump and Biden, one of the things that must be acknowledged is that that, whatever may have been his motives, Trump did contribute to ending the state of Cold War in the Korean peninsula, though he could have done more. Tensions have eased, and the people of all of Korea are the beneficiaries. Biden, however, was a Cold Warrior when it came to Korea while he was vice president and there are worries that under Biden, there will be a return to the status quo ante of knife edge confrontation that marked relations between North Korea and both Democratic and Republican administrations before Trump.

The status of both South Korea and Japan as US satellites will be unchanged under a Biden presidency. They really have no choice, being militarily occupied countries. With Japan hosting 25 major US military bases and Korea 15, plus scores of smaller military installations, these two countries serve as the Pentagon’s principal springboard for the containment of China.

Human rights and US diplomacy towards Kim, Xi, and Duterte

Certainly, Washington will pick up the cudgel of human rights against North Korea’s Kim Jong Un, which it had dropped totally under Trump. Also, human rights will occupy a more central piece place in Biden’s approach towards China than it did under Trump, though Biden’s need for Xi’s support to

maintain his shaky domestic position will probably soften his invoking it. Biden will also probably mention human rights vis-à-vis Duterte in the Philippines, though Duterte's early congratulations to Biden, Biden's need for support from foreign leaders for his legitimacy, and Duterte's continuing threat to abrogate the US-Philippine Visiting Forces Agreement may induce the president-elect to bring down the volume of the human rights loudspeaker several decibels lower than during Obama's time.

Parenthetically, human rights are an extremely important advocacy, and international civil society and the United Nations should promote it more aggressively. The problem is that when the US uses it, it is instrumentalized as the "soft power" part of Washington's foreign policy repertoire aimed at advancing its economic and strategic interests. And it is seen as extremely hypocritical by people around the world since there are so many egregious human rights violations in the US, like the systematic repression of Black people. Human rights advocacy is only effective if the one advocating it has the moral high ground. The US no longer has that (though it is questionable if it ever really did), though one suspects Biden and his people have a blind spot when it comes to this.

Foreign policy and the US domestic divide

All these projections are, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, based on one

fragile assumption—that Biden will be able to succeed Trump. The mood in the US today is, let's face it, one of civil war, and it may only be a matter of time before this mood is translated into something more threatening, more ugly. Indeed, even if Biden takes office, it is hard to imagine how any administration can conduct any kind of foreign policy under such conditions of deeply divided legitimacy, where unrestricted political warfare is waged over every significant issue, domestic or foreign. Of course, the CIA and Pentagon bureaucracies will continue to function as per their DNA, but contrary to Trumpist claims about the independent dynamics of the "deep state," political leadership matters, and matters greatly.

For the rest of the world, it is a big question mark if a US so deeply preoccupied with itself that it cannot conduct a coherent foreign policy is a plus or a minus. That is, however, a topic for another essay.

WALDEN BELLO is co-chair of the Board of the Bangkok-based think tank Focus on the Global South and Adjunct Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton. His recent reports for Focus include "Trump and the Asia Pacific: The Persistence of US Unilateralism" (2020).

UNCERTAINTIES AND CONTRADICTIONS: IMPLICATIONS OF A BIDEN PRESIDENCY FOR PHILIPPINE-US RELATIONS

BY GALILEO DE GUZMAN CASTILLO

Against a backdrop of unbacked claims of electoral fraud, lawsuits on shaky ground, and rage tweets about the US election outcome, the dust of Donald Trump's looming White House exit is slowly starting to settle and the formal transition from a Republican to a Democratic presidency—bitter and sans a concession as it may be—begins. As President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take up the torch in January 2021, he would be swamped with a plethora of domestic and global issues and the need to confront

substantive challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergency, mangled economy, democratic backsliding, and damaged diplomatic relationships, among others. What would Biden's coming to power mean for US-Philippines relations?

Both Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Vice President Leni Robredo, in separate statements congratulated Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris five days after the US elections. The Malacañang Palace said

it sees no major changes in the ties between Manila and Washington and would “keep an open mind [as it] looks forward to working closely with the new administration (...) anchored on mutual respect, mutual benefit, and shared commitment to democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.” This signals, at least for the time being, an inclination to cooperate and strengthen relations, a far cry from the insult and cursing that then-outgoing President Barack Obama got in 2016 in response to his criticisms over the war on drugs and the spate of extrajudicial killings under the Duterte administration. Meanwhile, Robredo described the Democrats’ victory as, “an affirmation of the shared ideals on which the long friendship between [the Philippines and US] stand: democracy, civil rights, faith, and inclusivity.”

These are signposts that the Philippines would most probably be favourably disposed towards the Biden administration’s plan to restore its internationalist and global leadership role and to return to traditional US diplomacy and multilateralism, eschewing Trump-era “America First” policies. To what extent and for how long, however, remains uncertain.

Biden’s foreign policy vision, as laid out in his essay, “Why America Must Lead Again” rests on three pillars: 1) reinvigorating democracy at home and renewing coalition of like-minded democracies around the world; 2) strengthening economic security and aligning economic practices and policies with democratic values; and 3) restoring and reimagining partnerships and mobilizing



The triangular relationship between China, the Philippines, and the United States will be a delicate one to manage after a rocky six years that began with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte cursing President Barack Obama and saw Duterte tell the Trump administration he was ending the Visiting Forces Agreement between Manila and Washington. (Rappler)

global action on global threats like climate change, mass migration, and technological disruption. Biden commits to bringing together the world's democracies within his first year in office to "strengthen democratic institutions, confront the challenge of nations that are backsliding, and forge a common agenda to address threats to [the US and others'] common value." This includes fighting against corruption, pushing back against the rise of authoritarianism, and advancing human rights and democratic values. On November 24, Biden introduced his cabinet picks for national security and foreign policy and proclaimed, "America is back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it."

A critical question is raised: How would all these figure in, take shape, and influence the geopolitical configurations of the world, the Indo-Pacific region, and in particular, the Philippines?

Despite the highly touted "independent" foreign policy (friend to all, enemy to none) of Duterte and a definite pendulum swing from one established superpower to an emerging one, the US-Philippines military alliance dating almost 70 years back with the signing of the post-World War II Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) of 1951, has endured. Even during the erratic four-year presidency of Duterte, characterized by his whimsical and incoherent foreign policy, and playing a hedging diplomatic game among China, Russia, and the US to gain political and economic concession, the joint US and Philippine military operations have continued. The Philippine security establishment and foreign policy

technocrats, led by top generals and career diplomats, have persistently voiced ardent support for the preservation and enhancement of the century-long alliance with its erstwhile colonizer. This meant maintaining a robust and unfettered US military presence and sustained power projection for "regional peace and stability" in the Indo-Pacific region.

From 2016 to 2019, the US has provided more than \$550 million in military assistance to the Duterte regime—consisting of aircrafts, naval ships, armoured vehicles, small arms and munitions, and other military equipment—by far the largest US military aid in the region. The latest was the delivery of \$18 million worth of missiles and weapons systems "to help the [Philippine] government in its anti-terror fight" against ISIS-inspired groups in Mindanao and the donation of \$33 million worth of ScanEagle Unmanned Aerial System to the Philippine Navy to augment its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations around the hotly contested areas in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea.

Despite conflicts with the constitutional mandates of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest, and the right to self-determination, the MDT and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) of 2014 that allows the US military to conduct security cooperation exercises, joint and combined military trainings of US and Filipino soldiers through Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder), and humanitarian assistance, disaster relief operations, and counterterrorism, remain intact. The suspension of the termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement of 1999 (VFA), a bilateral

agreement that operationalizes the MDT and facilitates the unhampered entry of US military personnel, vessels, and aircraft in Philippine territory was extended again early November for a second time, for another six months until 2021. This way, Duterte would be able to use it as a negotiating chip to gain more concessions from a newly installed Biden administration who would prefer the non-abrogation of the accord, which has always been skewed towards US interests and nothing of genuine benefit for the Philippines.

Indubitably, China and contesting its rising power will remain at the top of the US foreign policy agenda in Asia, with the interest of guaranteeing trade routes and freedom of navigation operations, strengthening defense ties with its allies and partners in the region like the Philippines, and in Biden's own words, "building a united front of US allies and partners to confront China's abusive behaviours and human rights violations." With the bipartisan consensus in US politics of treating China as a strategic competitor and growing calls for a more assertive stance on China, a Biden-led US administration would most certainly continue increasing and intensifying its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea to contain China's maritime domination and expansionism.

Beijing's diplomatic and economic clout has risen sharply in Southeast Asia over the last few years, with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and alongside its growing military assertiveness and territorial expansion ambitions. In mid-November 2020, a major free trade pact among Asia-Pacific nations

(with three of the four largest economies in Asia: China, Japan, and South Korea), the Regional Comprehensive and Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement was signed. In contrast, the US is not a party to the RCEP; neither is it a player in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) because it withdrew from the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 despite the agreement being signed already.

Last year, China was the Philippines' top trading partner, with a total trade amounting to \$35.31 billion or 19.3% of the country's total trade with exports of \$9.81 billion. Still, the US and the Philippines maintain a strong trade and investment relationship, with over \$19.64 billion in total goods and services traded and \$11.57 billion in exports. But while the Philippines recorded a trade deficit of \$15.68 billion with China, it registered a trade surplus of \$3.5 billion with the US, according to latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority. What are the prospects under a Biden presidency? Biden as Vice President of the Obama administration in the past supported the TPP and the Biden administration has also indicated its desire to re-join the CPTPP, with its internationalist and multilateralist stance. If it does, the Asia region in general and the Philippines along with it can expect a trade and investment policy environment that imposes even more unhampered liberalisation in the midst of selfish intellectual property restrictions and deepened economic inequalities.

How the Biden administration will exercise its power and diplomacy in the region while staying true to its declaration of

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returning democratic values at the heart of US foreign policy would just be one of many contradictions it will need to resolve. The US wants to regain its perceived loss of credibility and moral leadership, from the way it is handling pressing domestic concerns, such as being number one in the world’s most number of COVID-19 cases, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, unrest among workers and displaced labour, and climate emergencies in a deeply polarized

nation. Can the US step down from having the highest military spending at \$732 billion or 38% of the global total, and instead fund economic recovery and social protection? Demilitarizing and denuclearizing US foreign policy and cutting US military spending would be required for Biden to stay true to his bold declaration to “end forever wars.”

Would Biden be able to renounce US hegemonic pursuit of global military dominance and pursue cooperation based on peace and respect for human rights and democracy?

A very stark and major point of disagreement and tension between the US and the Philippines would still be the question of human rights, which has many times been the sore point for Duterte. His penchant for diplomatic engagement has always been contingent on whether a country supports or criticizes his violent war on drugs, acquiesces to or condemns his regime’s blatant human rights violations and abuses, and parrots or challenges his self-serving notion of sovereignty and distorted sense of justice. We saw many times both at the national and international stage how Duterte and his administration have responded defensively to the growing pressure on the Philippine government over human rights issues by disseminating false and misleading information through propaganda and hiding behind the “weaponizing of human rights” rhetoric, red-tagging progressive groups and activists, as well as vilifying human rights advocates and defenders.

Just two months ago, the Philippine Human Rights Act (PHRA) was introduced by

Biden's Democratic party-mate Pennsylvania Representative Susan Wild, following the enactment of the Philippines' Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of 2020—an instrument that threatens to further intensify the Duterte regime's state violence and terrorism and attacks against democratic rights and fundamental freedoms. The PHRA seeks to "suspend US security assistance [and foreign military sales] to the Philippines until such time as human rights violations by Philippine security forces cease and the responsible state forces are held accountable." Predictably, Duterte's allies have reacted negatively against the PHRA, with the Presidential Spokesperson punning and making light of the proposed legislation: "a wild suggestion."

Biden, whose presidency would most likely exhibit a general "conciliatory" tenor, may or may not raise the issue of human rights and openly condemn the Duterte regime's transgressions for fear of retribution and rebuke from Duterte himself and his lackeys. At the end of the day, the bottomline is about not compromising one's principles. Whatever the US stands to lose in a strained relationship with the Philippines, and the strategic considerations of losing a key ally vis-à-vis China's aggressive moves to alter the traditional balance of power and drive to gain greater global influence, the US would be hard-pressed to recover from a position of not standing up for the principles of democratic values or acquiescing in the face of injustice. The US would also not want to be painted as a hypocrite and enabler of authoritarian regimes but it would also need to confront its long history of neo-colonialism and imperialism, rights violations,

and its association with many instances of destabilization of governments of other democracies. As the old proverb goes: "Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

On the extreme side, Biden may completely be uninterested in engaging the moribund and imminently lame duck presidency of Duterte and may prefer to wait and seek a more advantageous bilateral relationship with the Philippines—with a possibly more malleable and obsequious successor in two years' time. Duterte, on the other hand, may be too preoccupied with the nearing Philippine General Election in 2022, busy propping up his handpicked successor and cementing his legacy, which has so far been largely defined by extrajudicial killings, rights abuses and terror, widespread corruption, kowtowing to China, and a criminally incompetent COVID-19 and disaster response. There are a lot of uncertainties and contradictions at play.

But without a shadow of doubt: regardless of what Biden's and Duterte's respective attitude and approach to each other will be, both at a personal level and as heads of state and government and chief architects of foreign policy—cautious or brazen, strident or dulcet, domineering or unassuming, amenable or impervious—China will be keeping a self-interested eye on how Manila and Washington will get along.

GALILEO DE GUZMAN CASTILLO is a Philippine Program Officer with Focus on the Global South.

WHAT WILL A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION MEAN FOR THE CLIMATE?

Biden will bring the US back to the Paris Accord but his agenda may fall short of what is necessary to address the climate emergency.

FROM GLOBAL JUSTICE NOW

BY DOROTHY GRACE GUERRERO

Many celebrated the electoral defeat of Donald Trump, danced in the streets and cried with tears of joy. For those from the progressive movements, it was a hard-earned victory born out of their collective power and strong political will to confront white supremacy and fascism.

It was a time to rejoice and give affirmation to the incredible national efforts of grassroots organising in the US by black communities and people of colour, labour groups, environmental and climate justice organisations, indigenous peoples, and the LGBTQIA communities and to build a broad popular front between them. They delivered the essential votes needed to give

that narrow electoral victory to Joe Biden. Many swallowed hard and held their noses while voting for Biden, aware that the threat of a Trump victory left them no other viable choice once Bernie Sanders' candidacy was deliberately crushed by the Democratic Party itself.

Four years of Trump's racism are far too long and the policies that he put in place to normalise racism, promote rent-seeking and block climate actions are far too destructive, not just to US politics and democracy, but for the world as a whole. His approach to a still uncontrolled global pandemic and actions against various multilateral efforts will continue to have effects for many years to come.



Trump withdrew the US from the Paris Accord. Biden has said he will rejoin the agreement. What other steps his administration will take to help fend off an impending catastrophe remain to be seen. (*Wikimedia Commons*)

It is indeed good to enjoy a global sense of relief that Trump was outvoted and will not become the re-elected president of the most powerful country in the planet. As such, we should celebrate Biden's victory, but there are good reasons to remain cautious that the worst is not over. Trumpism is not yet over. Corporate America and its tentacles will not disappear with a shift of parties or politician at the helm.

In fact, US social movements and the global social justice movements should strengthen further and prepare soon for a new struggle against Biden's politics, which we fear will still result in corporations being the main beneficiaries. Unless progressive groups are

able to do this, there is a big risk that the world will get another Trump, perhaps even more dangerous than the first, four years from now.

As Naomi Klein pointed out in her post-election analysis, Biden's record in his four decades in public office and his political positions on crucial issues show that he is likely to only offer too little to address what people need. It would indeed be naive to think that he will push for the systemic changes needed to tackle the planetary state of emergency on health, the global economy and the climate emergency. For now, at least, it is enough that he is not Donald Trump.

Biden's pledges on climate change

Joe Biden has said he will “listen to science” and promised to take new stances on tackling Covid-19, climate change and other key issues during the election campaign. He recognises that climate change poses an existential threat not just to the environment, but also to health, communities, national security, and economic well-being.

Many climate groups appreciate that his approach on climate change will be fundamentally different from Trump's. He promised to immediately reverse Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement that came into effect on 4 November and to lead by example and call on other countries to increase their domestic climate ambition. During the presidential debate, he declared there will be a “transition from the oil industry” and an end to new drill leases for public land and water.

DURING THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE, BIDEN SAID THE GREEN NEW DEAL IS “NOT MY PLAN”, BUT HIS OWN CLIMATE PLAN CO-OPTED SOME OF THE POPULIST LANGUAGE OF THE GREEN NEW DEAL.

His transition team have said the administration will put the US on “an irreversible path to achieve net-zero emissions, economy-wide, by no later than 2050”. These US emissions reductions would lead to a decrease in end-of-century warming of around 0.1°C above pre-industrial levels. According to estimates by Climate Action Tracker, that, combined with net-zero targets from China, Japan, South Korea and other countries, could put the Paris Agreement's target of 1.5°C of total warming within reach. The transition will be through the use of a broad mix of tools, which will include developing advanced nuclear power plants, as well as technologies that can capture carbon dioxide from fossil-fuel plants. In addition, he says he'll push to end fossil-fuel subsidies worldwide.

Are these appropriate measures, do they go far enough, and who will benefit?

How far the new US government can go on climate, however, will not only be challenged by the Republicans' possible majority in the US Senate. There is a need to challenge Biden's definition of “boldness”.

During the first Presidential debate, Biden said the Green New Deal is “not my plan”, but his own climate plan co-opted some of the populist language of the Green New Deal. However, a ‘net zero’ emissions target by 2050 supported by \$1.7 trillion of spending over 10 years may not do the magic. ‘Net zero’ is not the same as zero emissions and disguises climate inaction. Net zero simply means corporations will still

have a free reign to keep polluting with the vague future promise of removals through increasingly popular nature-based solutions (NBS). These predominantly mean forest offsets, afforestation and reforestation with tree plantations, and other false solutions and techno-fixes. Forest restoration (tree-planting) has limited potential and can only offset a share of emissions. There is simply not enough land to counterbalance the rate of current and projected emissions.

Governments keep promoting concepts such as net zero. The problem with it is that the companies, whose profit margins literally depend on a worsening climate crisis, will simply keep operating as normal. The only long-term and sustainable way to stabilise the climate at any temperature target is to reduce anthropogenic CO2 emissions to zero and that requires a radical reduction in fossil carbon emissions. Techno-fixes are unlikely to ever be rolled-out at scale.

Carbon capture, which is also in the plan, could extend reliance on fossil fuels. Biden also did not call for a ban on fracking, which is a major demand of climate justice groups. And his plan includes other measures that are rejected in climate justice circles like climate smart agriculture.

On the other hand, his relations with labour unions and interest to get their support are reflected in his plans. He promised to keep worker's right to join unions and exercise collective bargaining in all the infrastructure to be built to pursue emission reductions – building new power plants, increase clean energy capacity, and upgrading and building homes. He also pledged to create

1 million new jobs in the American auto industry, domestic auto supply chains, and auto infrastructure, from parts to materials to electric vehicle charging stations. But it will be a private sector-led process, and the private sector will reap the main gains.

He has also promised to provide every American city with 100,000 or more residents with high-quality, zero-emissions public transportation options through flexible federal investments with strong labour protections that create good, union jobs and meet the needs of these cities to improve existing transit networks and bus lines.

Yet while there are some positives in Biden's climate agenda, together they are simply not far-reaching enough, and do not go far enough in confronting the actual climate emergency we are in now. They will not disrupt the current climate profiteering and the system that is damning even his own country, which is already besieged by floods and uncontrollable forest fires. Climate action also means more than job creation.

Joe Biden wasn't the first choice or even a top choice of most climate activists. So, just as in the UK, it will take strong organising and concerted pressure from the bottom up to push governments towards fundamental change. Only then will this be a decisive step forward for the planet.

DOROTHY GRACE GUERRERO is
Head of Policy and Advocacy at Global
Justice Now.



Focus on the Global South combines policy research, advocacy, activism, and grassroots capacity-building in order to generate critical analysis and encourage debates on national and international policies related to corporate-led globalisation, neo-liberalism and militarisation.

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