

United States: The Biden Administration's Foreign Policy

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HAS THE U.S. population become convinced that the “war on terrorism” promoted after 9/11 is a fool’s errand, or are there other enemies that can be conjured up?

Certainly, as Washington has withdrawn its troops after a 40-year intervention in Afghanistan, the answer may be yes. It is a bitter yes for the more than 850,000 U.S citizens who served there. Many thought they were on a mission to root out terrorism and rebuild a country, often realizing they were on the side of warlords and massive corruption.

The bitter stories they have shared with their family and the larger public testify to their reality as the Biden administration accepted the trap that the Trump administration had negotiated with the Taliban. The withdrawal was even more chaotic than the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam and given the right wing’s anti-immigrant, anti-asylum campaign, the fewer refugees who fled will face much less of a welcome in the United States.

If the 1980s proxy war in Afghanistan accelerated the demise of the Soviet Union, the U.S. post-9/11 adventure has clearly proven to be a failure at every level. If we look at the costs of the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, Washington spent \$8 trillion, one-quarter in Afghanistan. Across the region, at least one million people are dead and 38 million displaced.

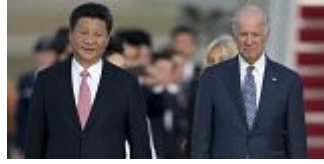
With the extensive use of drones and the military involvement of 39 other countries, U.S. deaths were limited to about 7000. It’s estimated, however, that longterm care for injured soldiers will cost another \$2 trillion. Added to those figures are the more than 30,000 suicides that soldiers, once home, have committed.

Only a few of the human rights violations committed by U.S. forces have come to light, most famously the 2004 Abu Ghraib prison torture in Iraq, where photographs revealed scenes of naked, humiliated prisoners as soldiers posed nearby, smiling. President George W. Bush insisted that was not a systemic problem but rogue acts of a few dishonorable soldiers, who were the ones punished.

During this period, the press reported the U.S. military’s use of interrogation techniques such as waterboarding, sexual harassment and abuse, physical abuse, and sleep deprivation. Defenders of these torture techniques claim it was ethically permissible because it produced military intelligence that may have saved lives. A Senate Intelligence Study proved these claims false.

Perhaps less remembered is the 2007 video of Apache helicopter crew members laughing and killing civilians, including children, on a Baghdad street. It surfaced three years later on WikiLeaks and

may be one reason the U.S. government is so eager to keep Julian Assange locked up.



Imperial presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden

A New Front

Although President Barack Obama was unable to extricate the troops from Afghanistan, and in fact increased drone strikes that Bush had begun in Yemen, he wanted to “pivot” to Southeast Asia in order to counter growing China influence in the region. His Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal included Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam - but left China out in the cold.

As Japan’s prime minister Shinzo Abe commented in 2016: Washington’s “success or failure will sway the direction of the global free trade system and [shape] the strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific.” (See [“Barack Obama’s ‘Asian pivot’ failed. China is in the ascendancy,” by Simon Tisdall, *The Guardian*, Sept. 25, 2016.](#))

However, the TPP, opposed by the U.S. labor movement and both 2016 presidential candidates, went nowhere. But the Biden administration sees the same issue of China’s emergence as an economic power as well as a military-political one, as an *ATC* editorial pointed out ([“Biden: Empire Is Back...”, *ATC* 212](#)). Yet Washington must think through their maneuvers. China has become “the workshop of the world.” It also has its own developmental projects that are successfully competing with U.S. and European investments in Asia, Africa and even Washington’s “back yard” in Latin America.

Like Obama, Biden wants to “pivot” to Asia. Despite his promise to China that “we are not seeking a new Cold War,” his stance indicates rising tension. So also does Biden’s new Ambassador to China, R. Nicholas Burns, calling Beijing an aggressor in its relations with countries such as India, Vietnam, the Philippines and Japan.

Burns invited the Senate to do more to help Taiwan protect itself from China, particularly through arms sales. Burns also denounced China’s genocidal policies against the Muslim Uyghur population, the smothering of Hong Kong autonomy, continued abuses in Tibet and aggressive threats against Taiwan. While the Chinese Communist Party’s rule is dictatorial, brutal and authoritarian, such anti-democratic policies have never bothered Washington in its dealings with friendly regimes such as Saudi Arabia - or for that matter with China, when it seemed advantageous.

Preparing for Military Confrontation?

While China’s military might has grown, it spends just a third of the U.S. military budget. On the other hand, the U.S. military’s dominance in Asia has been steadily eroding. That makes for a dangerous situation, as Beijing views Taiwan an island that must unify with the mainland and as the Taiwanese are increasingly resistant. U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price recently emphasized that U.S. support for Taiwan is “rock solid,” saying “we have also been very clear that we are committed to deepening our ties with Taiwan.” Meanwhile, two members of Congress have called for a clarification of Washington’s longstanding “strategic ambiguity” about defending Taiwan.

It was only in October 2020 that U.S. intelligence reports picked up Beijing's leaders were worried that President Trump, desperate about his impending election defeat, was preparing to attack. It was at that moment that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark A. Milley, chose to reach out to his counterpart and provide an assurance. Early this October the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the U.S. military has been secretly training Taiwan's military forces.

On September 15, a trilateral partnership was announced by Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. The pact, known as AUKUS would turn Australia into a state having nuclear-powered submarines. Although this was announced as a way to secure peace in the Indo-Pacific region, China responded the following day that the move was doing just the opposite, undermining peace and security in the area.

In a Sept. 21 letter to *The New York Times*, Rose Gottemoeller, former U.S. undersecretary of State for arms control and international security, stated that AUKUS "has blown apart 60 years of U.S. policy" designed to minimize the use of highly enriched uranium. "Such uranium makes nuclear bombs, and we never wanted it in the hands of nonnuclear-weapon states, no matter how squeaky clean."

While details remain unclear, it is conceivable that while the submarines are being built, Australia might lease U.S. or UK nuclear-powered submarines. According to the Arms Control Association, the technology is not limited to submarines. It will also include "sharing artificial intelligence, underwater systems, and quantum, cyber-, and long-range strike capabilities." Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison also raised purchasing "Tomahawk cruise missiles and extended range Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles." (["U.S., UK Pledge Nuclear Submarines for Australia," by Julia Masterson, October 2021](#)).

The Biden administration certainly wants to put off a military confrontation with China, and the feeling is undoubtedly mutual, but there can be unintended consequences from rhetoric and a series of actions that spin out of control. This is true of both Biden's approach to China and to walking a tightrope in extending nuclear weapons. It is scary!

Other Foreign Policy Initiatives

Some who voted for Biden assumed he would initiate a friendlier foreign policy such as the normalization of relations with Cuba that was a signature of the Obama administration. But in the case of Cuba, Biden added to sanctions Trump imposed. In a number of Latin American countries, the policy remained similar.

Certainly, that was true in Haiti where the Biden administration backed President Jovenel Moise, who had ruled by decree since 2018. Moise's plan was to rule while holding a constitutional referendum followed by elections in 2021. But the country was overtaken by violent gangs and Moise was assassinated, Washington backed the first official who assumed control, acting prime minister Claude Joseph, who declared a "state of siege." However, Moise had appointed Ariel Henry interim prime minister days before his death, and Henry assumed control with Washington's backing.

Since the 1991 U.S.-backed coup against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was elected by a mass democratic movement, the country's political instability has dovetailed with a series of tropical storms, torrential rains, hurricanes and two major earthquakes including one in this past August. Little aid arrived.

By the middle of September, 30,000 Haitians attempted to enter the United States. Some had been

displaced by the earthquake a decade ago and others were more recent refugees. Border patrol quickly destroyed their encampment. As migrants walked across the Rio Grande to cross into Texas, agents on horseback lashed out at them with leather straps. Eight thousand were forced back into Mexico; 2,000 were rounded up and flown back to the chaotic miser of Port-au-Prince.

But because photos of agents whipping refugees went viral, the Biden administration was forced to give 12,000 permission to remain in the country until their asylum requests are evaluated by U.S. immigration judges. An additional 5,000 may get the same chance.

Aren't they all candidates for asylum given that Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere suffered an earthquake that left more than 2,000 dead? What is Washington's level of responsibility after decades of supporting its dictators, invading the country, manipulating its politics and forcing Aristide into exile?

Putting Vice President Kamala Harris in charge of curbing immigration might have set her up for a fall. On first her trip abroad, she told Guatemalans and Mexicans that the journey north was dangerous and would result in being turned back at the border. Harris, the daughter of immigrants, warned people threatened by violence, "Do not come. Do not come. The United States will continue to enforce our laws and secure our borders."

Harris promised to address the root of their problems while standing next to Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, a repressive and corrupt politician. To date Biden has not even lifted Trump's Title 42, which prevents, for supposed public health reasons, the entry of people claiming asylum. In July, the administration announced that it would deport immigrant families through a process of "expedited removal," bypassing the need for hearings before a judge.

In summary, we could conclude that the Biden administration foreign policy is a continuation of dangerous and inhumane practices embedded in decades of Republican and Democratic administration, only becoming worse as the United States' world hegemony erodes and its domestic politics become increasingly vicious.

Dianne Feeley

P.S.

• Against the Current, :

<https://againstthecurrent.org/the-biden-administrations-foreign-policy/>

• Dianne Feeley is an editor of Against the Current. She is a retired autoworker active with Autoworker Caravan, a network of active and retired autoworkers who advocate for union democracy and a non-fossil fuel transportation industry. She is also active in Detroit Eviction Defense.