

## US 2020 Elections – Will Biden make America Great again?

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**Abstract** *As America had faced several racial protests and injustices during Trump’s era, Biden took a strong stance on racism in US and stated that racial injustice must be dealt with through broad economic and social programs to support minorities. Donald Trump’s vision of “Making America Great Again” and of capitalizing and fortifying the intrinsic capabilities of America is what sets him apart from the previous Obama regime. Trump’s Strategy in South Asia has been three-fold and its targets are primarily four countries: Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and China. With Biden coming into presidency, there is hope that the United States foreign policy might return to a pre-Trump era and even Republicans are hopeful for a return to the good order. The main issues with which Biden administration will struggle in the coming day will be in convincing the American people once again that global reengagement and multilateralism will help in improving the United States’ standing once again. Many of Biden’s aides are claiming that there is a possibility that America’s approach to problems can be reinvented and there is an effective policy blueprint for Biden’s first 100 days and those beyond which will fix most of what they can.*

**Key Words:** US 2020 ELECTIONS, Biden, Trump, America

### Introduction

#### Background to US 2020 Elections

The year 2020 has been quite challenging for the United States and President Trump because the president had to deal simultaneously with the pandemic, racism and as well as the approaching 2020 elections for his second term. During these elections, the national attention was on the economic disruption as a result of the pandemic and the protests that flooded the States after the death of George Floyd. President Trump and Joe Biden had quite a tough competition as in the major states the percentage difference of votes for each contestant was minor. In Florida, Trump won the majority and in Gorgia, Michigan and Arizona, Biden was victorious. On the other hand, the presidential debates were not very impressive especially because of President Trump who made the first debate too chaotic that people reported to feel annoyed after that. Hence, it was generally perceived that Biden did better than President Trump in the presidential debates.

Till the announcement of the final results, President Trump kept questioning the process of voting legitimacy as he clearly did not seem to recognize and accept Joe Biden’s victory. The results of the 2020 elections were formally confirmed on December 14, 2020, declaring Joe Biden as the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States through electoral college victory along with Kamal Harris as the next vice president.

#### Why are the US 2020 Elections Important?

The presidential elections of the United States have always been significant because of its superpower status that has an impact on the rest of the world. Whatever policies that the new president makes have global consequences due to which US elections get the worldwide attention. The elections in 2020 were a lot more

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crucial because of President Trump's controversial personality that made him gain a lot of haters and supporters and also made him become one of the most popular personalities in the world. President Trump's policies are known to have disrupted the global liberal order as he intentionally undermined the working of the global institutions and the US allies especially Europe has been distanced because of Trump's hostility towards NATO and European Union.

Being the world leader, President Trump's decreasing role in the international crises and his support for dictators holds immense significance for the world and it was predicted that his second term can potentially lead the world into more destabilization. For most of the world, Joe Biden was perceived as the conventional US leader who would be able to shift the focus of the US policies to the previous foreign policy trends and the US presence in the East Mediterranean would result in its stability which is lacking currently.

### **Republicans in Power: US Foreign Policy under President Trump**

Since the beginning of his first term in 2016, President Trump while formulating foreign policy focused upon promoting the narrative "America First". Throughout his campaign he promised to make America great again and to pursue this he believed that the US involvement abroad is burdening the nation; therefore, it should be limited. President Trump's determination of prioritizing US national interest tilted its foreign policy towards isolationism. His administration received harsh criticism from the US allies as he not only tried to cut foreign aid but also undermined the international institutions. Trump criticized NATO members, imposed tariffs on partners and threatened Mexico to stop the flow of immigrants from the southern border.

For a long time, US foreign policy was focused upon Middle East, but Trump administration indulged itself into great power competition with China recognizing it as a major threat to US. The US-China relations under Trump have been worse than they were before. President Trump supported Taiwan and took a hard stance on South China Sea against China. Withdrawing from Transpacific Partnership created a gap for China to fill and the US role as a security provider was doubted by its allies. Moreover, the trade war with China was a setback for US economy.

In the Middle East, Trump withdrew from JCPOA and Iran had to deal with economic sanctions which made it more hostile; hence, the peace could not be achieved. Trump's Middle East Peace Plan to resolve Israel-Palestine conflict was another flawed proposal that resulted in more instability in the region and he faced a huge international reaction against this. Furthermore, the US-Canada relations deteriorated as Trump criticized NAFTA and decided to renegotiate it.

The supporters of President Trump and the republicans argue that Trump has strengthened the US hard power by taking all these actions and prioritizing America. However, most analysts agree that Trump failed to propose a cohesive foreign policy that would have increased the role of US as a global leader and boosted its national economy. He relied upon his incompetent family members and adopted a business centered approach towards his policies neglecting the critical role he had in global politics and in specific regions in the world. He is known to be someone who prefers quick fixes, and his use of twitter diplomacy is a manifestation of that. During his tenure, America's credibility has been questioned and his choice of distancing US from the World Health Organization lead to a great backlash in the height of global pandemic. Stepping back from the Paris Agreement also hampered the US soft power influence in the world and created a vacuum for China to claim a moral high ground.

### **Democrats in Power – US Foreign Policy under Biden**

In what was characterized as the "America First Approach" – the infamous slogan that helped rally support for Trump in the 2016 presidential elections – Trump forged protectionist policies that centered upon border controls, strict immigration policies, increased tariffs, withdrawal from trade agreements and development of military capabilities. However, during the November 2020 elections, then presidential candidate Joe Biden took a completely different line of action and made promises that stood at odds with Trumps policies. Biden promised his voters that he would create new economic opportunities for workers, restore environmental protections and healthcare rights and international alliances. He took a clear stance on some key issues like that of controlling

the spread of Corona virus, creating jobs, creating criminal justice reforms, rejoining of climate accords, foreign policy, education and immigration.

Biden stated that he would tackle the challenge of coronavirus by providing free testing for all Americans and also form a national contact-tracing programme. He stated that he wants to establish around 10 testing centers in every state, demanding that the federal agencies would deploy resources for this purpose. Another key issue pertaining to job creation was also addressed by Biden. He stated that would extend loans to small businesses and increase direct money payments to families. He proposed that that an additional \$200 in Social Security payments per month be made. He also stated that tax cuts made by Trumps administration will be revoked and \$10,000 of student loan forgiveness will be granted for federal loans. However, Biden's broader economic policies, called "Build Back Better", have the objective of supporting young people as well as the blue-collar workers.

As America had faced several racial protests and injustices during Trump's era, Biden took a strong stance on racism in US and stated that racial injustice must be dealt with through broad economic and social programs to support minorities. He wishes to do this through the creation of business support for the racial minorities through a \$30 billion investment fund. He also proposed that policies must be formed that reduce incarceration, address race and gender based disparities in the justice system and rehabilitate prisoners. However, he opposes policies that call for defunding the police, stating that resources should be channeled into the police force to maintain their standards.

Rallying support for issues like climate change has also been Biden's area of focus during his election campaign. He firmly believes that climate change is an existential threat, which must be dealt with on emergency basis. He stated that carbon emissions must be curbed globally and US can play it's role in doing this by rejoining the Paris Climate Accord. Earlier, Trump had withdrew from the Accord that demanded that US cut it's greenhouse gases up to 28% by 2025, based on 2005 levels. Moreover, Biden has proposed a \$1.7 trillion federal investment in green technologies research and has also envisioned that the US reach net zero emissions by 2050. He does, however, reject the "Green New Deal" – a package that was put forth by some members of his Democratic party that hoped to create jobs and also curb climate change.

As far as the foreign policy front is concerned, Biden has propagated for multilateralism and engagement with all actors on the world stage, as opposed to Trump administrations isolationist policies. Biden has also stated that he would further strengthen US relations with US allies, particularly with the NATO Alliance that Trump had undermined by threatening to undermine with funding cuts. He intends to engage with Asian countries as well, hoping to continue Obama's Pivot to Asia policy. He did suggest, however, that China should be held accountable for its unfair environmental and trade practices. This should be done through an international coalition that can hold China accountable rather than via unilateral tariffs.

In the domain of healthcare, Biden promised to expand public health insurance scheme passed by Obama's administration - the Obamacare. He stated that all Americans would have the option of enrolling in a public health insurance option similar to Medicare. In addition, Biden also aims to overturn Trump's policies on immigration such as those that separated parents from children at the US-Mexican border or those that put limits on the number of applications for asylum as well as the travels bans imposed on people travelling from different Muslim-majority countries. He also wishes to make education as much accessible to Americans as possible. He has endorsed several education policies that have been popular within the party such as student loan debt forgiveness, expansion of tuition-free colleges and universal preschool access.

## **Analysis**

Donald Trump's vision of "Making America Great Again" and of capitalizing and fortifying the intrinsic capabilities of America is what sets him apart from the previous Obama regime. Trump's foreign policy has been a departure from the previous government's policy objectives that called for increased foreign engagement and trade diversification. Trump's National Security Strategy of 2017 and 2018, both, reinforce the America First Approach explained above in the context of security and defense. However, it rejects the correlation of this approach with isolation or US neglecting her commitments abroad. Rather, it reiterates it's full devotion to strengthening ties with its allies and playing its role as a great power in the international community. In this strategy, Trump

administration recognizes Russia and China as potential competitors. Trump's America First policy comprises of another key component, which calls for increased border controls and stricter immigration policies to be in place. During the Obama Administration, this was not the case as asylum could be granted to refugees more easily.

Trump, however, has viewed these earlier policies to have negatively affected USA's national security and economy. He focused primarily upon America's Southern border with Mexico, claiming illegal immigrants coming from there are a threat to America's peace and stability. Thus, he called for restriction of legal immigrants, building up of a wall on the Mexican border, restriction of undocumented immigrants, curtailment of asylum seekers and refugees.

One of the primary objectives of the Trump administration has been to increase employment opportunities and boost the economy. However, Trump has criticized earlier governments for favoring international trade to a large extent and claims that unfair trade agreements have affected United States' economy negatively. In turn, he has levied increased tariffs on countries – among which the most prominent has been China between which a trade war also ensued – and also left and renegotiated certain trade agreements such as NAFTA.

Trump's Strategy in South Asia has been three-fold and its targets are primarily four countries: Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and China. Trump aims to diversify and secure United States interests in Afghanistan while planning a withdrawal of its forces from the country where it had exhausted its entire economic, political and military prowess for nearly eighteen years. Secondly, forging a relationship with Pakistan that can help secure its interests in Afghanistan and guarantee that Pakistan does not facilitate terrorist activities in any way. Thirdly, United States aimed to develop a strategic ally in the region in the form of India that can help counter the growing threat of Chinese dominance in the region. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, Trump called for peace talks to be held between the US and Taliban in order to find a way out of the Afghan war. Despite the failure of talks in the initial phases, a peace agreement was recently signed by the two parties, under which US and the NATO forces shall withdraw their forces in 14 and the militants shall not allow Al Qaeda to gain stronghold in key areas. This has been a major development in US-Afghanistan relations.

In an attempt to reverse Trump's domestic as well as foreign policies, President Biden is sure to bring a shift in America's approach towards other countries. Many analysts state that owing to Biden's international exposure and rapport abroad, he is more likely to develop cordial relations with European and Asian states. Biden is well versed in the process of foreign policy formation and in learning about every country and how it functions. His foreign policy rests upon seven pillars. Firstly, Biden's administration is going to be keen on forming a strong Western alliance. Biden hopes to protect US transatlantic relationship and has also called for a summit for protecting democracy in 2021. Trump's "America First" approach had weakened America's transatlantic alliance with Europe but Biden aims to restore this.

Secondly, Biden aims to repair relations with NATO. He will certainly try to broaden its scope and mission by including 21<sup>st</sup> century threats such as military technology and cyber threats. Moreover, Biden also firmly believes in international treaties and institutions and in their power to bring about change. He intends to rejoin the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and to engage with WHO to shape a stronger global response to Covid-19 pandemic. He also wishes to strengthen the Iran nuclear deal that Trump abandoned in 2018 by working closely with Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany. Moreover, Biden will also be stricter in enforcing human rights not just domestically but also internationally.

President Biden will also be tougher on undemocratic regimes and dictators. During his election campaign, he particularly warned autocrats that they will not longer be supported by US under his presidency. As far as US-Russia relations go, Russians are wary yet also hopeful about Biden's administration as they view it to be willing to restore traditional democratic channels that were earlier disrupted by the Trump Administration. Biden is also expected to support and cooperate with less developed countries like the African nations. Moreover, Biden is expected to bring back the role of America as a global power by addressing global challenges ranging from the pandemic to economic revival and terrorism. All in all, Biden's Administration is expected to be more pragmatic, principled and cooperative in its approach to dealing with domestic as well as foreign issues.

### **Shift in United States' Foreign Relations**

With Biden coming into presidency, there is hope that the United States foreign policy might return to a pre-

Trump era and even Republicans are hopeful for a return to the good order. The United States' allies internationally also breathed a sigh of relief and, "You could sense the unknitting of shoulders all the way from Seoul to Sydney."

But the stark truth is that the United States' foreign relations cannot return to their former state overnight. Biden has come into power at a time when the world is in the midst of a global pandemic of which the political, economic, and social fallout is still uncertain. Relations with China are at the lowest point since half a century ago, North Korea has achieved self-declared nuclear power status which American Presidents had never wanted, and the NATO alliance is at its weakest.

Two of the major fronts on which the current United States' foreign policy is greatly different than when Biden was previously part of the administration are China and the Middle East. It is speculated that in terms of China, Biden also has an opportunity now and could continue to hold onto tariffs for a better exchange as Trump has left sufficient leverage. Biden will also inherit leverage from Trump on Iran as well due to Trump's maximum pressure campaign.

In terms of China, Biden administration aims to keep China's expansionism in check and put a halt to China's rising regional influence but not at the cost of conflict. The United States new policy will aim to use alliances and institutions in surrounding China and attempting to hinder its growth. Japan has also hinted at its willingness to cooperate with the Biden administration with 70 per cent of its people in support of international cooperation.

The Biden administration is unlikely to view China as its best friend because one of the contenders for Biden's defence secretary position, Michèle Flournoy, has already come up with a step-by-step plan to effectively deter China. But this does not mean that Biden will go to war with China or allow the existing circumstance to escalate. It is likely that the United States will take on a more cooperative role with China before attempting to regain some of its lost footing.

Under Biden, it is a likely scenario that Biden will reach out to all of the previously allies of the United States made during his time as Vice President under President Obama which Trump shunned during his administration. Biden will also use his existing connections in order to rekindle old allies and strengthen the United States' international standing. Biden is prepared to restore the United States' belief in NATO as he has shared over calls with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. They are aware that Biden is willing to revitalize alliances and they are waiting for him to do so. In terms of Russia, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty will come to an end in February 2021. This will be the first ever attempt in limiting the nuclear stockpiles of Russia and the United States since 1972 and Russia has hinted at willingness to deal.

Trump has left the United States in a perilous situation with Iran and Palestine and Biden is aware that it will be difficult to bring peace talks back on the table. Biden aims to take a more modest approach and only attempt to keep the situation from getting worse. Iran is willing to talk with the new administration and Biden's Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, has hinted at willingness to lift sanctions in order to salvage the deal.

In terms of Iran, it is suggested that it is far better if Biden is to take a more cautious approach and consult with the United States' allies in coming up with a mutual strategy which will help the Iranians come back to the discussion table for a better deal. At an early stage, it is not in Biden's favour to push the United States back into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and risk displeasing Congress.

For Iran, it can be expected that a new deal might be proposed because Biden was in favour of the Iran Deal when it was made during the Obama administration. The new plan may not be the same as the Iran Deal which Trump pulled out of but it does not mean that the United States cannot come to new terms with Iran. And in order to improve relations with Iran, Biden will also pull out the United States' support of the Yemen war being led by, anti-Iranian, Saudi Arabia.

Under Biden's administration, the United States will also re-join the different organizations and treaties and agreements which were left by Trump. For instance, Biden has already promised to join the Paris Accord and WHO again. Biden also view NATO as one of the most effective military-political alliance in history and sees it as an effective countering to Russian influence. Biden is also eager to pledge \$2 trillion dollars to cut the emissions of the United States and combat climate change.

In sum, Trump has left the United States' foreign policy in a disastrous state for the upcoming Biden administration. Trump has left the United States amidst a poorly handled global pandemic. Employment rates in the country are high with relief packages being denied to the people, racial tensions are at an all-time high with the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter movement, and the migration issue at the border with Mexico and reactions of ICE are also degrading the United States' image in the international world and for it domestically. And while certain changes can be expected in the United States' foreign policy towards the world, the changes will be slow to come and it is too soon to expect the foreign policy to do a complete 180-degree shift.

Tamara Wittes, a senior fellow at the Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings states that Biden's resolve to sympathize and his mastery and experience of common diplomacy will play in his favour. It was also argued that Biden was more likely to have a practical view of foreign policy issues. Biden administration has plans to start reinventing the foreign policy starting domestically and then reinvesting its previous alliances before re-joining certain institutions such as the Paris climate accord and the World Health Organization. Domestic efforts will include what Biden terms as dealing with the damage Trump has done to the 'deep state.'

## **Conclusion**

The main issues with which Biden administration will struggle in the coming day will be in convincing the American people once again that global reengagement and multilateralism will help in improving the United States' standing once again. Biden will also need to be cautious of his standing within Congress before making any major political decision as even though he has become the President of the United States, the Democrats have a narrow hold in the House of Representatives. Volatile acts leading towards the disability of the country have already been witnessed with the Capitol Hill riots when far right people invaded the building and wrecked havoc.

The America First policy will be removed from the United States because Biden will not want the United States to be isolated on the international platform. With Kamala as his Vice President, the Biden administration will try to appeal to the non-white people of the United States and try to fix the divide between people of other communities and at least try to ensure that another event like the death of George Floyd is avoided.

This all indicates that Trump has left many issues for Biden to deal with and many problems to fix if Biden wishes to bring the United States back to its former prestige and power. If the United States wished to tackle the growing influence of China then Biden must efficiently exercise the United States' soft power and improve Sino-American relations. Since the United States has been set on withdrawing its troops from around the world and the global environment at the moment makes it unable for the United States to exercise its military power, then Biden must set upon recovering the economic situation first if he wished to achieve anything at all.

Many of Biden's aides are claiming that there is a possibility that America's approach to problems can be reinvented and there is an effective policy blueprint for Biden's first 100 days and those beyond which will fix most of what they can. The United States will largely depend upon allies in order to boost its diplomatic standing.

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