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## Trump Leaves Biden a Quarantine...But Against China



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Donald Trump is making sure that President-elect Joe Biden has great difficulty getting out of the starting gate in January. On the domestic front, the chief of the General Services Administration, Emily Murphy, is refusing to allow the start of the transition in the short period between the election in November and the inauguration in January. Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin is stopping a set of Federal Reserve lending programs that will undermine the Biden administration and the entire U.S. economy. Trump's bogus claims about the conduct and count of the election undermines governance and even our democracy. Trump's enabler-in-chief, Attorney General William Barr, is using a politicized Department

of Justice to echo Trump's fraudulent claims, complicating Biden's efforts to even get into the starting gate by January 20th.

On the national security front, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's swan song visit to Israel will complicate Biden's effort to press Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a two-state solution and to stop the illegal construction of settlements throughout the West Bank. Pompeo used the visit to endorse Israel's illegal annexation of the Golan Heights and to reinforce recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital. Pompeo also denounced the boycott movement against Israeli exploitation of the West Bank as a "cancer," and denigrated anti-Zionism as anti-Semitic "by its very nature." Pompeo's pressure tactics against Iran will make it harder for Biden to reestablish the Iran nuclear accord that Israel opposed.

The Trump administration's economic warfare against China over the past several years will make it particularly difficult for Biden to pursue the necessary adjustments for one of the most important relationships in the world, the Sino-American relationship. For the past several years, Trump has pursued a trade and tariff war against China that has harmed U.S. farmers and consumers, and has restricted the profitable trade of technology with Chinese firms.

Trump stupidly blocked U.S. participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the United States has remained on the sidelines while China forged the largest regional economic arrangement in history, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. China's economic influence in Southeast Asia is expanding at a time of regional uncertainty over U.S. political and economic ties to the region.

Unfortunately, the Biden team is sending the wrong signals about the future of Sino-American relations. Last week, a veteran *Washington Post* reporter, Missy Ryan, noted that the Biden administration is preparing to "strike a relatively steady course at the Pentagon," including "pressing ahead with efforts to respond to China's rise." There is really nothing that the Pentagon can usefully do about the increased presence and influence of China in East Asia. While the United States has been preoccupied for the past twenty years chasing ghosts in Iraq and Afghanistan, China has moved adroitly to modernize its air and naval forces, and to build important political ties throughout the region. China's sophisticated cruise missile technology has compromised the presence of the U.S. surface fleet in the Pacific, including our vaunted aircraft carrier presence. I participated in various war games at the Central Intelligence Agency and the National War College over the years; the United States never won a war game with China in East Asia.

If Biden is serious about reframing the important Sino-American bilateral relationship, he will need to rebuild and embolden the Department of State, which has been hollowed out by Trump's inept secretaries of state, Pompeo and Rex Tillerson. There has not been a single constructive proposal out of Foggy Bottom since Secretary of State John Kerry and the Obama administration left Washington. A strategic diplomatic plan is required and, in view

of the common interests between Washington and Beijing, there are obvious starting points for resetting the bilateral game. In addition to dumping the policies of the Trump administration, a new policy should address the mutual interests of the two most important members of the global community, including their concern to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons, their opposition to terrorism, and the need to curb global warming.

China is an important co-signer of John Kerry's Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iran nuclear accord, and would support Washington's return to the treaty. China would also support negotiable limits on North Korea's nuclear program, realizing that Pyongyang's dynamic strategic program allows Washington to justify a greater military presence in the region. Over the past several years, China has quietly become one of the most important participants in the peacekeeping activities of the United Nations, which points to Beijing's importance as a stakeholder in stabilizing Third World trouble spots as well.

There are obvious tradeoffs for reducing Sino-American military activities in the Pacific. The United States could offer to reduce surveillance of the South China Sea in return for limits on China's military presence on the South China Sea islands. The United States could reduce its forces on Guam in return for less Chinese military pressure against Taiwan. An Incidents at Sea Treaty modeled after the U.S. treaty with the Soviet Union in 1972 would be beneficial. The effective use of diplomacy is likely to restore stability to the Sino-American bilateral relationship. Incremental military measures in East Asia would only contribute to additional posturing and friction.

The Biden national security team will be experienced and expert, but there is no sign of an out-of-the-box thinker in the group. Tony Blinken is expected to be named secretary of state.

He's a solid choice to revive the morale at the Department of State and to restore the role of diplomacy. But he's an interventionist who supported the use of military force against Libya in 2011, and sold Biden on the idea of fragmenting Iraq into three autonomous states (Shia, Sunni, and Kurd) in the wake of the 2003 invasion. Jake Sullivan, who played a key role in negotiating the Iran nuclear accord, is expected to be named national security adviser. He could restore sanity and stability to the decision making process. Neither one has ever addressed the idea of seeking conciliation with China.

Biden's likely choice for secretary of defense, Michele Flournoy, is a China hawk, believing that beefing up U.S. military capability in Asia is the answer to the China problem. She is a product of the military-industrial complex, and presumably will not support the idea of reducing our bloated defense budget. The Pentagon sorely needs a reformer such as Richard Danzig or Larry Korb.

Kurt Campbell, the assistant secretary of state for Asia under Barack Obama and a possible player in the Biden administration, believes that the containment policy that worked against the Soviet Union would work against China. Campbell's wife, Lael Brainard, a possible choice

for secretary of the treasury, is also a China hawk. Biden was particularly tough on China during the presidential campaign and referred to Xin Jinping as a “thug.”

Well, China isn’t the Soviet Union, which was once described as an “Upper Volta with nuclear weapons.” Unlike the Soviet Union of the 1980s, China isn’t about to collapse; China’s economy is certainly not irrelevant; China has strong international standing; and China has stable leadership. When Kurt Campbell convinced the Obama administration to “pivot” from the Middle East to the Pacific, he underestimated the problem of extracting the United States from its Islamic quagmire, and the creativity and resourcefulness of China’s military and economic modernization.

The Biden team will be overwhelmed by the long list of internal and external problems that it will face due to the wretched inheritance from the Trump administration, but it cannot delay addressing its most important bilateral issue—China. Any measure of power would conclude that China is a rising international and regional power, while the United States is facing decline because of huge economic deficits and misplayed military policies. Biden will have to maneuver around an anti-China bias that has grown in U.S. political and punditry circles; recognize the political and economic power of the Chinese state; and find a diplomatic way to meet China halfway in response to Beijing’s increased influence.

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