

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم و پر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

07.10.2021

The Mounting Confusion of President Biden's National Security Policy



Photograph Source: Matt Johnson – [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

It has been nearly 70 years since the United States elected a president with the foreign policy and national security experience that rivaled Joe Biden's. His only rival in this category, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, placed troglodytes in key positions such as the Dulles brothers (John Foster at State and Allen at the Central Intelligence Agency) and Vice President Richard Nixon, who were ideologically opposed to dealing diplomatically with the Soviet Union. As a result, Eisenhower missed a significant opportunity when the death of Joseph Stalin opened the door to possible negotiations with the new leadership in the Kremlin.

Not even Eisenhower had the experience that Biden accumulated over nearly 50 years in government that included 20 years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (12 of

those years as chairman or ranking member) in addition to eight years in the White House as vice president. During the campaign of 2019-2020, Biden frequently cited his trips to more than 60 countries and his one-on-ones with more than 100 national heads of state. Biden privately boasted about his ability to dominate the national security bureaucracy, stressing that not even the “military will fuck with me.”

Now, we are nine months into his administration, and there is no comprehensive picture of Biden’s priorities in foreign policy, let alone a Biden doctrine or strategy. Biden has proclaimed an end to “forever wars,” but U.S. forces remain active in Iraq and Syria, where there are more than 3,000 U.S. combat forces. Elsewhere, the United States is conducting shadowy operations and drone strikes in such places as Libya, Somalia, and Yemen. So there is no reason to believe that U.S. forever wars will actually end.

U.S. forces are active in Kenya, Mali, and Nigeria, conducting counterterrorist training or operations in dozens of additional countries. There is no indication that Biden will be reducing these activities despite the significant civilian casualty rates from drone strikes. These strikes received little attention until a “righteous strike” killed an aid worker from Kabul and nine members of his family. Meanwhile, the list of groups that are susceptible to drone strikes remains classified, and there is no word of the new policy to govern drone strikes and commando raids outside conventional war zones. Biden’s national security team promised the release of such a policy more than a month ago.

The pathetic handling of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Australian nuclear submarine deal beg serious questions about the professionalism of Biden’s national security team as well as the direction of Biden’s foreign policy. Our European allies with forces in Afghanistan had reason to be angry about the chaotic departure from Kabul, and presumably will be far less willing to increase their investment and their level of risk in support of U.S. military missions. These allies anticipate that the U.S. “pivot” to Asia will be at the expense of European security, and expect U.S. demands for greater European defense spending.

The exclusion of France from the submarine deal with Australia made a mockery of Biden’s efforts to rebuild the transatlantic alliance, which was the focus of his trip to Europe in June. Like former president Charles de Gaulle, French President Emmanuel Macron got a rude lesson in U.S. favoritism toward Britain, notwithstanding Britain’s departure from the European Community and the moronic behavior of its Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. In view of France’s longstanding enmity with Britain, Macron was particularly infuriated.

Meanwhile, there is no indication that the Cold War atmospherics that developed in U.S. relations with Russia and China in the Trump administration are being addressed, let alone alleviated. Biden's constant references to a campaign of "democracies vs. authoritarians" suggests continued polemics with the term "authoritarians" substituting for the "communists" of an earlier Cold War. Last month, the Department of Defense quietly removed the deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear and missile defense, which leaves the Biden administration without a serious arms and disarmament expert at a time when it is finalizing its Nuclear Posture Review. Biden once warned President Barack Obama not to get "boxed in" by the military, but he has certainly been boxed in on the issue of disarmament. Any downgrading of disarmament serves to block a key path to serious diplomatic dialogue with the Kremlin.

A "group think" approach is in place vis-a-vis China, with hard-liners occupying key posts. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and his number one deputy, Kurt Campbell, are hard-liners on China, and the director of the China office at the National Security Council, Rush Doshi, strongly believes that China is trying to "displace" the United States in the global community. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has no background on Asia generally or China specifically, and he has been assigned another hard-liner, Ely Ratner, a Sullivan acolyte, as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs.

The Australian nuclear submarine deal, which roiled the European community and violated the spirit of the Non-proliferation Treaty of 1969, is a classic sign of containment regarding China. Containment worked against the Soviet Union because of the political and economic irrelevance of the Soviet Union; China is relevant internationally. Only Britain has received such nuclear technology for its submarine force, and that was over 60 years ago.

Biden has missed an opportunity to enforce non-proliferation by not returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iran nuclear accord. In the meantime, an election in Iran has moved the country further to the right, which complicates any revival of the accord. Similarly, Iran's aggressive enrichment activities and limitations on inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency also hinders a return to the JCPOA. The Biden administration also has been ignoring the importuning of the South Koreans to revive bilateral talks with North Korea.

The chaos in Afghanistan and the submarine deal are leading European officials to question the intentions and credibility of the United States. A high-ranking German

official remarked that the major difference between Trump and Biden is the absence of tweets. The French are trying to interest the European states in forming their own peacekeeping force in order to have greater strategic autonomy. Macron, like de Gaulle in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis, has been questioning the U.S. commitment to Europe, and several years ago declared that NATO was “currently experiencing...brain death.”

The U.S. “pivot” to the Pacific that was declared ten years ago to distract from the sudden withdrawal from Camp Freedom in Iraq marks the militarization of U.S. policy toward China, when the actual challenge is economic in nature. Washington never should have walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was the perfect vehicle for competing with China in East and Southeast Asia. Building a policy toward China around a submarine deal seems particularly bizarre in view of the fact that these ships won’t be operational for 10-15 years. Last month, the Chinese even applied for membership in the TPP, which points to Xi Jinping’s sense of humor and the inadequacy of U.S. policy.

President Biden is preoccupied with serious domestic challenges at this particular point in time, so it is essential that his National Security Council and the Department of State fill the current void in national security policy. Two Republican Senators—Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley—have contributed to the weakness of the Department of State by blocking confirmation of key deputies and assistant secretaries. Only one U.S. ambassador has been confirmed since the inauguration of Joe Biden.

The Pentagon is clearly exploiting this vacuum in decision making by exaggerating the threat of China as well as terrorism in its briefings on the Hill, which have been parroted verbatim by the mainstream press. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, has used briefings to warn about the renewal of al Qaeda’s prominence in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. If anything, al Qaeda appears to be particularly dysfunctional at this point in time, and the Taliban government in Kabul will have its hands full dealing with ISIS-K in the near term. The Pentagon, well known for its worst case analysis of international events, seems off base in anticipating that the Taliban will serve as the headquarters of international terrorism.

Donald Trump certainly made a bad national security situation worse, but there is little indication that Joe Biden is willing to address those international problems that are susceptible to diplomatic intervention. Otto von Bismarck once remarked that “God has a special providence for fools, drunkards, and the United States of America.” We can only hope so.

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent book is “American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump” (Opus Publishing), and he is the author of the forthcoming “The Dangerous National Security State” (2020).” Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](#).

CounterPunch 06.10.2021