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The US Election: Preliminary Lessons for US Allies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: It appears likely that Joe Biden will take office as president of the United States in January, and American allies will need to assess the implications. The reimposition of a revised Iran nuclear deal and reemphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian issue are to be expected, as is re-engagement with international organizations. Another likely factor is a diminishing of pressure on China. But the politicized nature of the American security state and the administration's promised "Europeanization" of American laws and norms may also facilitate cooperation even as American corporate domination is promoted.

Though the result of the 2020 US presidential election is still pending litigation over allegations of pervasive fraud that helped the Biden campaign, US allies have been unrestrained in their expressions of happiness and relief at the prospect of Trump's ouster. As Biden is indeed likely to take office in January, US allies in the Middle East and elsewhere need to take stock of the implications of a Biden administration.

The Trump administration was routinely excoriated for its defiance of "norms" and for its eschewing of experts. What would the reestablishment of these "norms" by Obama-era experts mean, particularly in a world reorganized by Trump, the coronavirus pandemic, and China?

As a whole, Trump's foreign policy is being retroactively condemned as "chaotic" for its military disengagement from conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria, economic confrontation with China, and disdain for international institutions. All these aspects will likely be reemphasized in a Biden administration.

One obvious result will be the return of the so-called "experts," who, in the case of the Middle East, were proven failures at both bringing peace to the region and promoting American national interests. A foreshadowing of their return is that the

breakthrough Abraham Accords, which were negotiated by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, are already being buried by a torrent of elite abuse.

Much has been and will be said about the Iranian nuclear deal, which Biden and his advisors have promised to reenter, albeit with the continued maintenance of some sanctions. Two points bear emphasis. First is continued evidence of Iranian cheating both past and present, most recently revelations that Iran massively exceeded agreed-to levels of stockpiled enriched uranium. Second is the parlous state of the Iranian economy, which has been brought to near-collapse by sanctions.

Rescuing Iran from disaster is a specialty of Democratic administrations; recall Obama's unwillingness to support the Green Revolution of 2009. But thanks to the Trump administration and their own initiative, the Gulf States and even Saudi Arabia are less dependent on US security arrangements, have opened relations with Israel, and may be in a better position to foil renewed US overtures to Iran. Saudi Arabia in particular would be well advised to formalize relations with Israel now as a counterweight to American pressure.

The Trump policy of encouraging independence from the US is likely to be reversed in pursuit of another Iran-centered "grand bargain" that will lead inexorably toward Iranian nuclear capability. This threatening reversal might encourage Gulf States to look to China for big power support. Israel's strengthening of its alliance with Gulf States could help convince them to avoid this trap.

Israel itself has far less room to maneuver. Despite the professed affinity for Israel and Jews of Biden and Harris as individuals, their Obama-era staffs can barely contain their hostility. The hated figures of Netanyahu and Trump loom large, as shown by evidence of obstruction from State Department staffers and foreign policy "experts" who impeded and derided Trump policies at every turn.

Though reversal of the US Embassy move to Jerusalem is unlikely, it is more difficult to say which other specific policies might be overturned. In general, a return to the process-obsessed Obama policy is likely. We will probably see a resumption of high-profile shuttling between Jerusalem and Ramallah and to other capitals like Ankara, which will bestow influence on malign actors such as Turkey. All this will be sweetened with high-sounding talk of fairness and justice, condescending undertones of knowing better, and the notion of a two-state solution, which means one thing to Israelis and something quite different to aging Palestinian leaders.

In the process, old myths, wielded as threats, that the Trump administration had begun to bury will be resurrected, including the purported centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian issue to the Middle East and Muslim world and the threat of ostracism and the BDS movement to Israel. Israeli leaders will instinctively dig in their heels, lament the loss of Trump's unique support, seek out Congressional allies,

and publicly fret. They would be well advised to sit tight and keep their own counsel in the opening rounds.

Elsewhere, a Biden administration will likely worry about weak spoiler states such as Russia while blustering about China and coming down hard on Eastern European states that deviate from EU *diktats*. Biden's promises to resume American participation in international institutions in order to oppose China fail to acknowledge that most UN organizations are effectively Chinese-owned and operated. Moreover, the promise to reduce American fossil fuel production means reducing energy independence in favor of solar technologies currently dominated by Chinese firms. The unhappy result may be to bow even more deeply to Chinese aggression. Getting ahead of this disastrous cycle is vital for allies.

But another even more negative lesson for US allies is that the American intelligence and security bureaucracy is thoroughly corrupt and politicized in the sense of being populated by party loyalists who identify the nation's interests, and their own, as being the same as the Democrats'. It was this sector that, with the collusion of media and Big Tech, took a Clinton political dossier and turned it into a weapon against Trump while refusing to investigate both Clinton's (and Obama's) mishandling of classified documents and the Biden family's influence-peddling.

How much of this was known to foreign intelligence agencies cannot be determined (though the collusion of British intelligence is clear). The American public has been conditioned, including through blatant censorship of the news, to believe these documented realities are "conspiracy theories." But this realization is unlikely to come as a surprise, and may in fact facilitate cooperation with agencies that undertake such manipulations in their own societies. These too are norms, albeit cynical ones.

Foreign agencies that are accustomed to surveilling terrorists and political opponents alike, and where Chinese-style mass surveillance is being constructed in the name of protection, will see much that is familiar in their American counterparts. Gone is the pretense that American intelligence and security agencies are different, and that they operate within a legal framework and a larger system of checks and balances between branches of government.

Here and elsewhere European politicians will recognize kindred spirits in a Biden administration, which shows every inclination to Europeanize American society. This will mean curtailing free speech in the name of political correctness, including the expansion of "critical race theory"; curtailing religious liberty (except for Muslims) in the name of anti-discrimination; harnessing the economy to debilitating agendas of equity and "green" development; and opening the borders to illegal immigration in the name of refugee resettlement, with the clear effects of suppressing wages on behalf of capital and diffusing national identity.

While European states have made desultory efforts to control Big Tech, a Biden administration shows little inclination to challenge corporate domination of the American economy. Allies should expect the new administration to promote the continued global extension of American corporate control, particularly over their technology and information economies.

In short, many countries, except those directly threatened by China, Turkey, and Iran, will find much common ground with a Biden administration. Smaller countries on the front lines in Southeast Asia or the Middle East will not. The comfortably patronizing imperialist view—embraced unironically by European states even as they concede to Russian energy blackmail and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative—that only the US can lead nations in every hemisphere, in every domain, and in every conflict should be resisted. But it is not clear how to practically and economically resist the reimposition of “predictability” and “norms” that work to the advantage of so few, Americans included.

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