

US President Biden: How to Deal With China

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The lexicon has changed. Words and phrases that seemed to define our world until quite recently now belong to a bygone era. Remember BRICs? The grouping of the next economic superpowers. Well, Brazil, Russia, India and China now resemble a brash start-up promising a whole new way of doing things only to fall out among themselves.

Pivot to Asia? US forces redeploying. For what? Washington's response has been half-hearted and ponderous. The South China Sea has been turned into a Chinese military zone. End of story. No amount of US redeploying will change that fact on the ground or in this case on the sea.

OK, how about Belt and Road? China was going to establish new markets along the traditional trade routes on both land and sea. We are not masking the truth when we acknowledge that in a time of COVID these trade routes will not be as active as once envisaged. And the Thucydides Trap? This suggested that a rising power challenging an established power will probably end in conflict. From China's point of view that type of talk is redundant. China is no longer rising, it has emerged. No conflict.

Sanctions on China? Exports from China to the US rose 7.9 percent over 2019 to \$45.2 billion despite tariff hikes on most Chinese goods by the Trump administration. You can hardly blame them in Beijing if they are asking for more sanctions.

Make America Great Again? America always was great not just through its economic muscle but because, at its best, it inspired. The American dream was not fantasy. But the storming of Congress showed an ugly side, a brush with fascism, that its opponents, China among them, will capitalise on. After the storming many US politicians repeated, on cue, the mantra "This is not who we are."

In Asia and China they asked, who are you? There have been times when it was who you were. The treatment of Native Americans, the 1954 overthrow of the democratically elected government of Guatemala, at the behest of the United Fruit Company opposing labor reforms, Allende overthrown and killed in 1973 in Chile, yes on 9/11. Marcos in the Philippines. There are many more instances. Washington has a long history of organizing the storming of parliaments in other countries.

The main problem facing the administration of US President Joe Biden is how to deal with China, how to work with it. Climate change, and the urgent need to tackle it, dictates that the Beijing dictatorship is embraced rather than shunned. Besides, establishing an anti-China coalition is pointless. There are countries in Africa, South America and Europe that just won't buy, literally, into any such a sentiment. Australia, Japan and South Korea have had and hope to have, a profitable relationship with China, even allowing for setbacks. The US has to mend fences, not lecture, after the Trump debacle. The tombstone of failed

leadership on the grave marking US abandonment of international obligations reads; the Paris Agreement, the World Health Organization, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership; NATO; weakened World Trade Organization; and imposed trade barriers on Washington's closest allies.

Biden has his work cut out. But China and the US are not enemies. They share common interests, such as climate change and the battle against the pandemic. China also faces huge challenges. In the rush to modernize its environment has paid a heavy toll. Its banking system is sclerotic. To describe it as Dickensian would be to give it a veneer of efficiency it does not merit. The largest note in domestic circulation is the 100 yuan bill (US\$16 approx). The main reasons for this are fear of counterfeiting and to prevent large amounts of cash leaving the country. China urgently needs to introduce foreign competition and expertise to reform its financial sector. Then there is human rights. Xinjiang is a stain on China's reputation and Beijing will be increasingly accountable for what is happening there. The great hope of Chinese modernizers that affluence would lead to more openness seems cruelly dashed. Chinese President Xi Jinping has one goal: to enhance the party's leading role in society. In short, he believes that too much prosperity can damage the party's health and that it lost too much ground in the years of largely coastal-region affluence, roughly 1990-2008, post Tiananmen to the financial crisis.

China will not be bullied but that does not mean Washington acquiesces.

Yes, the US is back. But China has arrived. Biden will be the first US president to deal with this. It will require a new lexicon.

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