

Biden's Journey: Change Is Imperceptible

Biden has been a major disappointment for those who hoped that he'd change course regarding America's pathological involvement in overseas conflicts.

By [Philip Giraldi](#)

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The new White House Team has been in place for more than a month and it is perhaps time to consider where it is going with America's fractured foreign policy. To be sure, when a new administration brings in a bunch of "old hands" who made their bones by attacking Syria and Libya while also assassinating American citizens by drone one might hope that those mistakes might have served as valuable "lessons learned." Or maybe not, since no one in the Democratic Party ever mentions the Libya fiasco and President Joe Biden has already made it clear that Syria will continue to be targeted with sanctions as well as with American soldiers based on its soil. And no one will be leaving Afghanistan any time soon. The Biden team will only let up when Afghanistan is "secure" and there is regime change in Damascus.

A big part of the problem is that the personnel moves mean that the poison from the Barack Obama years has now been reintroduced into the tottering edifice that Donald Trump left behind. Obama's United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice once made the case for attacking the Libyans [by explaining how](#) Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi provided his soldiers with Viagra so they could more readily engage in mass rapes of presumably innocent civilians.

Unfortunately, Sue is back with the new administration as the Director of the Domestic Policy Council where she will no doubt again wreak havoc in her own inimitable fashion. She is joined at the top level of the administration by Tony Blinken as Secretary of State, Avril Haines as Director of National Intelligence, Jake Sullivan as National Security Advisor, Samantha Power as head of USAID and retired General Lloyd J. Austin as Secretary of Defense. All of the appointees are regarded as "hawks" and have personal history working with Biden when he was in Congress and as Vice President, while most of them also served in the Obama administration.

Be that as it may, Joe Biden and whoever is pulling his strings have assembled a group of establishment warmongers and aspirant social justice engineers that is second to none. Those who expected something different than the usual Democratic Party template have definitely been disappointed. Hostility towards China continues with warships being sent to the South China Sea and the president is seeking to create a new [Trans-Atlantic alliance](#) directed against both Beijing and Moscow. The Europeans are reportedly not enthusiastic about remaining under Washington's thumb and would like some breathing room.

In a phone conversation where it would have been interesting to be a fly on the wall, Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that the United States would no longer ignore his bad behavior. The official [White House account](#) of the call included the following pithy summary:

“President Biden reaffirmed the United States’ firm support for Ukraine’s sovereignty. He also raised other matters of concern, including the SolarWinds hack, reports of Russia placing bounties on United States soldiers in Afghanistan, interference in the 2020 United States election, and the poisoning of Aleksey Navalny.”

And to be sure, there have already been a number of issues that Biden might have dealt with by executive order, like lifting the illegal and unjustified blockade of Cuba, that could have inspired some hope that the new administration would not be just another bit of old wine in new bottles. Alas, that has not taken place but for [a series of moves](#) to unleash another wave of illegal immigration and to [“protect LGBTQ rights globally.”](#) Biden has also retained a heavy military presence in Washington itself, possibly as part of a Constitution-wrecking plan to tackle what he is referring to as “domestic terrorism.” The domestic terrorists being targeted appear to largely consist of people who are white working and middle class and voted for Trump.

In some ways, foreign policy might have been the easiest fix if the new administration were really seeking to correct the misadventures of the past twenty years. Quite the contrary, Biden and his associates have actually reversed the sensible and long overdue policies initiated by Donald Trump to [reduce troop strength](#) in Germany and bring the soldiers home from Syria and Afghanistan. Biden has already committed to an indefinite stay in Afghanistan, America’s longest “lost” war, and has covertly sent more soldiers into Syria as well as Iraq.

As regards Latin America, the U.S. clearly is prepared to double down on regime change in Venezuela, [continuing its Quixotic support](#) of Juan Guaido as president. Meanwhile, the new Secretary of State Tony Blinken has clearly indicated that there will be no end to deference to Israeli interests in the Middle East. Under questioning by Congress, he has insisted that Israel will be “consulted” on U.S. policy to include arms sales in the region, which has been interpreted to mean that Jerusalem will have a veto, and has confirmed that his view on Iran is identical to that of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Both are apparently promoting the view that Iran will have enough enriched uranium to construct a weapon within a few weeks, though they have not addressed other technical aspects of what would actually be required to build one. Netanyahu has been making the claim about the Iranian threat since the 1980s and now it is also an element of U.S. policy.

Biden and Blinken have also [moved forward slowly](#) on a campaign commitment to attempt renegotiation of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran that President Trump withdrew from in 2017. As a condition to re-start discussions, the Iranian leadership has demanded a return to the *status quo ante*, meaning that the punitive sanctions initiated by Trump would have to be canceled and Iran would in return cease all enrichment activities.

Biden and Blinken, which admittedly sounds a bit like a vaudeville comedy duo, have reportedly agreed to [withdraw the Trump sanctions](#) but have also suggested that Iran will have to make other concessions, to include ending its ballistic missile development program

and ceasing its “meddling” in the Middle East. Iran will refuse to agree to that, which means that the bid to renegotiate could turn out to be nothing more than a bit of theater involving multilateral “discussions” hosted by the European Union and the pointless hostility between Washington and Tehran will continue.

And speaking again of Israel, there have been concerns expressed by the usual suspects because Biden had not called Netanyahu immediately after the inauguration. It may be true that the president was sending a somewhat less than subtle message signaling that he was in charge, but the call has now taken place and everything is hunky-dory. As a separate issue, the Jewish state has, of course, the world’s only secret nuclear arsenal, estimated to consist of at least 200 bombs, and it also has several systems available to deliver them on target. For no reasons that make any sense, the United States since the time of President Richard Nixon has never publicly confirmed the existence of the weapons, preferring to maintain “nuclear ambiguity” that allows Israel to have the weapons without any demands for inspections or constraints on their use. The most recent four presidents have, in fact, signed secret agreements with Israel not to expose the nuclear arsenal. Biden has apparently not done so yet, but appeals by international figures, including most recently South African Desmond Tutu, had produced some expectations that the new administration might [break with precedent](#).

Giving aid to Israel is, in fact, illegal due to the Symington Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which bans U.S. economic and military assistance to nuclear proliferators and countries that seek to acquire nuclear weapons. But Biden has already indicated that he would not under any circumstances cut aid to Israel, so the matter would appear to be closed. In any event the Symington Amendment includes an exemption clause that would allow the funding to continue as long as the president certifies to Congress that continued aid to the proliferator would be a vital U.S. interest. Given Israel’s power in both Congress and the White House it is not imaginable that its aid would be affected no matter what Netanyahu and his band of criminals choose to do.

So, it would seem that Biden is unprepared to either pressure or pursue any distancing from Israel and its policies, not a good sign for those of us who have encouraged some disengagement from the Middle East quagmire. And one final issue where some of us have hoped to see some movement from Biden has also been a disappointment. That is Julian Assange, who is fighting against efforts to have him extradited from England to face trial and imprisonment in the U.S. under the Espionage Act. Many observers believe that Assange is a legitimate journalist who is being set up for a show trial with only one possible outcome. The entire process is to a large extent being driven by a desire for revenge coming largely from the Democratic Party since Assange was responsible for publishing the Hillary Clinton emails as well as other party documents. Biden [has already indicated](#) that the process of extraditing Assange will continue.

So, Biden has been a major disappointment for those who expected that he might change course regarding America’s pathological involvement in overseas conflicts while also having the good sense and courage to make relations with countries like Iran and Israel responsive to actual U.S. interests. Finally, it would be a good sign if Assange were to be released from the threat of trial and prison, if only to recognize that free speech and a free press benefit everyone, but that is perhaps a bridge too far as the United States moves inexorably towards a totalitarian state intolerant of dissent.

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Philip M. Girdaldi, Ph.D., is Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest, a 501(c)3 tax deductible educational foundation (Federal ID Number #52-1739023) that seeks a more interests-based U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Website is <https://councilforthenationalinterest.org> address is P.O. Box 2157, Purcellville VA 20134 and its email is inform@cnionline.org

He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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