

Will the Real Biden China Policy Please Stand Up?

*Commentary by John Mills
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The Biden Administration seems to be firmly straddling the fence when it comes to China.

On one hand, Secretary of State Blinken seemed to re-affirm former President Trump's firm stance against the Chinese Communist Party and even asserted that the CCP is conducting genocide in Xinjiang.

Having personally been part of national security reviews between administration's during my government service, I know it is not uncommon for subsequent Administrations to continue or even double down on continuing policy despite public hyperbolic political criticisms of the same policies. In that light, Secretary Blinken's comments were reassuring statements of intellectual honesty versus ideological automatism.

But then President Biden fumbled what should have been a softball question and has created significant confusion by attributing China's Uyghur genocide to different cultural norms. Waffling like this by President Biden undermines his own staff and sends potentially ambiguous and even dangerous signals to an adventurist, totalitarian nation.

This is not a good thing in international relations and points to other historical miscalculations that provided momentum to world catastrophes in Europe in the lead up to World War II, the Korean peninsula before the Communist North Korean Invasion of 1950, and Saddam's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The CCP and their agents of influence read, listen, and meticulously interpret everything, so Biden's unguarded comment likely led to hundreds of pages of analysis that informed and influenced the senior levels of the CCP. The inconsistent viewpoints on China by the current administration are not isolated, and do not go unnoticed.

The Good

Some Biden appointees have exhibited a tendency to dispense with political ideology and endorse the work of the previous administration. Admittedly they were not always favorable to the tone or demeanor, but in substance they have signaled an intent to dispense with partisanship and continue Trump-era policies.

Secretary Blinken has shown this wisdom to some degree and seems to be the leader of maintaining a disciplined approach to CCP misbehavior. This is positive, re-assuring, and refreshing if there is a hope of some semblance of bipartisanship on national security matters in Washington. NPR termed the Administration's approach as being a, "tougher policy on China and Taiwan than many expected."

Another key personality in building the administration's China Policy is Dr. Kurt Campbell, who is the National Security Council's Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific. He also is heralded in some quarters as being hawk-ish on China. Dr. Campbell was the architect of the "Pacific Pivot" during the Obama Administration.

The “Pacific Pivot” was a wise and timely initiative, an initiative that I was involved in. The challenge was it was introduced simultaneously with drastic DoD efficiencies (i.e., downsizing) as well as lukewarm participation by non-DoD Departments and Agencies which gave us few arrows in the quiver to actualize the policy. But in all fairness, policy assertions are themselves an important instrument of national power.

Other positive indicators include Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo praising President Trump’s tariffs against China and promising to continue use of the “Entity List” against China.

One other trend is Admiral (RET) James Stavridis, a noted Trump non-admirer and Biden advocate, asserting a strong counter-China military strategy (This is Trumpism under a different name).

He wisely articulates a strong military deterrent and red lines to contain China, essentially at their shoreline. His description of the CCP Islands in the South China Seas is apropos, “Juicy Targets.” I concur—they’ve created a watery Maginot Line that consumes resources, ties them down, and greatly

simplifies the problem set for allies, strategic partners, and joint targeteers and planners.

The Atlantic Council just came out with, “The Longer Telegram” written by “Anonymous.” The Atlantic Council is more aligned with the Biden camp, but this product articulates a very strong counter CCP strategy (they don’t like targeting the CCP and they are light on the topic of CCP influence operations within the United States). I haven’t done a complete cross reference but many of the tenets of the Committee on Present Danger China clearly show through in “Longer Telegram.” It’s Trumpism light, and their possible borrowing of ideas is encouraging.

The Bad

There are also confusing signals beyond President Biden’s potential history-altering Uyghur fumble. One issue Democrat administrations obsess over are treaties. They love treaties, which can be a useful tool if properly implemented and verified. Verified being the operative expression.

The lack of China being in few arms' limitation treaties (outside of the Biological Warfare Convention (BWC)) is likely a tact the Biden Administration will pursue. I have reviewed the BWC in detail, and it is a trust and don't verify arrangement which allows China to be boundless and adventurist in their Wuhan activities. This is not a good or model treaty.

The Biden Administration looks to reverse and end the re-introduction of low yield nuclear weapons into the American military arsenal because of interest in engaging on treaty dialogue with CCP-led China. I feel this is a very bad and irresponsible move. The re-introduction of these weapons provides a powerful deterrent effect toward expansionist China and Russia.

The ambiguity of the Biden Administration's policy on the Confucius Institute is disturbing. Right now there is parsing going on as to whether President Biden reversed President Trump's direction and intent on the Confucius Institute or whether the Trump administration failed to follow the mind numbing Federal Rulemaking Process on their Confucius issuance.

Either way, it appears the Confucius Institute has been unleashed to re-enter the campus environment. The continued enablement of Chinese access to capital markets by Wall Street firms such as BlackRock is shocking, but admittedly, this was also a problem during the Trump administration by cabinet members such as Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

A further point of concern is a number of Biden personnel that have exhibited communist sympathies and affiliations. Sam Faddis and Trevor Loudon have documented numerous personalities within the Biden Administration that have thinly veiled (or no veil at all) associations with the Communist Party.

Short of an amnesty for all Biden appointees to self-confess and walk away from their CCP ties, some of which may have been honest misjudgments from the era when China was looked at as a peaceful partner, the web of CCP ties of administration members is very disturbing. All of these scenarios deeply erode confidence in the Biden administration's willingness to stand up to the CCP and to reverse the pro-CCP infiltration of the Biden Team.

The Ugly

The key term in the analysis of the Biden China Policy: ambiguity. I would assert that ambiguity in the face of an assertive, expansionist state is a very bad idea. As the “Longer Telegram” cites, the CCP is “contemptuous” of weakness, which is interchangeable with ambiguity for the most part.

Right now, the CCP is under tremendous pressure at home. The economy is essentially fraudulent, and the CCP is out of funds to artificially continue the façade of a growing vibrant economy, as the Hong Kong businessman and democracy activist Elmer Yuen stated during a discussion with me while at the CPAC convention.

This is a very bad situation. A domestically pressured totalitarian predictably does only one thing, lash outward. It is better for us to sweat and labor now to deter and prepare than to pay a much higher cost later.

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