

Will Biden Really Stand Up to China?

U.S.-China policy lacks direction now, but what will it eventually look like?

*Commentary by James Gorrie, Writer
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How will President Joe Biden handle China? What's America's position on China's alleged slave and torture camps?

How will Biden stop Beijing from stealing U.S. jobs and intellectual property? How will the United States deter China from invading Taiwan?

At this point, we still don't have any concrete policy statements toward China from the new administration. Unlike Trump, who made decoupling from China his guiding policy, the Biden administration has offered no such overarching policy concept.

And, given that the Biden administration has delayed forming a China policy, it's anyone's guess as to

what their approach might be. However, if Biden's recent appointments are any indication, U.S. policy may be much more accommodating than that of the prior administration.

China Links

Several cabinet members have close or at least significant ties to China. That includes, of course, Biden himself. But there are also several other White House players who have disturbingly close relationships with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

For example, Douglas Emhoff, husband of Kamala Harris, has been suggested to have longstanding business ties to China via his former law firm. The firm worked closely with Chinese businesses associated with the CCP, according to the National Pulse. That's unfortunate. But since Harris occupies the vice presidency, any influence she may feel from her husband or his CCP contacts is baked into the administration.

Antony Blinken, Biden's secretary of state, may also be problematic. Blinken is cofounder of WestExec

Advisors, a consulting firm that helped American universities raise money from China “without jeopardizing Pentagon-funded research grants,” according to the Washington Free Beacon. One might imagine that tip-toeing around U.S. defense regulations to attract money from the CCP into U.S. higher education institutions would be a deal-breaker, but for Biden, apparently it’s not.

Ely Ratner, a veteran East Asia expert, was an executive vice president and director of studies at the Center for a New American Security before being named the administration’s chief principal adviser on China at the Pentagon. Ratner is a long-time Biden aide who, perhaps not so coincidentally, was also a colleague of Blinken at WestExec. That, too, may be problematic.

Then there’s Colin Kahl, Biden’s choice for undersecretary of defense. Kahl is a senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, which has a deep relationship with China’s Peking University. According to the Free Beacon, the latter institution is directed by CCP ex-head-spy Qiu Shuiping and has been linked to espionage cases in the United States.

Notably, a warning from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute underscores the “high risk” of partnering with Peking University due to its close ties with China’s military establishment, the Free Beacon notes. Again, if one is known by the company one keeps, such a close connection to the CCP ought to throw at least a shadow of doubt on Kahl’s judgement. But not for the Biden administration.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, a veteran of the State Department and Biden’s pick for U.N. ambassador, also has questionable ties to China. She’s a former senior vice president for the Albright-Stonebridge Group, a global business strategy and commercial diplomacy firm with offices in China and whose leadership includes a “former senior Chinese government official,” Jin Ligang.

Diversity and Groupthink?

This group is representative of the Biden appointees responsible for forming a cohesive and effective China policy. Although diverse on both the gender

and race scale, it seems much more aligned from an ideological perspective.

Having everyone on the same page is less of an advantage because it tends to foster group think. Policy meetings become echo chambers, where the same assumptions and analysis are baselined to similar policy objectives and interpretations of events. This particularly poses a significant risk when diplomacy becomes not just a means to an end, but an end in itself.

Diplomacy Over Outcomes?

Biden comes from a generation where supreme American power in the world was more or less a fact. That tacit understanding allowed for the luxury of exercising diplomacy with the consequences of American power unspoken, but yet clearly understood.

Those days are ending, and in particular with regard to China. Beijing's plans don't include sharing power with the United States but rather, replacing the United States.

But does Biden understand this? Do his advisers?

Or do they think that their relationships with Beijing will give them some kind of diplomatic advantage? This may be the case, especially given that the Biden administration has branded itself much smarter and more sophisticated than the prior one.

But will the unusual degree of financial engagement with China on the part of the administration result in outcomes that favor American interests? Or will they result in an overreliance on short-term diplomatic gestures that cede American power to Beijing over concrete actions that challenge China?

Challenging China, after all, isn't easy politically at home or abroad. Recall, for example, how little the Trump administration relied on the nuance of diplomacy when dealing with China. Rather, Trump relied on using hard-hitting trade policies to bring China to the negotiation table. Still, he was roundly criticized here and overseas.

Like Obama before him, Biden's approach is based on outmoded assumptions and multilateral globalist objectives rather than more narrow American

interests. That may be why no China policy has been announced from Washington. It seems probable that Biden's biggest challenge will be to keep the American public from knowing or understanding a China policy that doesn't favor America.

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