

Challenges Facing the Biden Administration (Summary)

Essay: Challenges Facing the Biden Administration

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The intersystem competition between the United States and China will be a long one, requiring patience. The first glimpse of this could be seen at the high-level talks held in Anchorage. The “long telegram” sent by George Kennan at the beginning of the Cold War asserted that the course of the confrontation with the Soviet Union depended on whether the United States could solve its own domestic problems and maintain the “health and vigor” of its society. That is the task of the Biden administration, which is seeking a fresh start for the United States while confronting China. American freedom and democracy are now at a standstill. The Trump-Sanders phenomenon is the result of long-term misgovernment by the two major parties, the ills of which are manifest in extraordinary disparities and a “prison state.” Consequently, objections have been prompted in the form of the rise of socialism on the left and the rejection of Reaganism on the right, and an ideological restructuring is now underway. Biden must overcome the political and economic deadlock brought about by the misgovernment in which he himself has participated in order to restore the “health and vigor” of US society. Failure to do so will make it difficult to win the intersystem competition with China.

1 Examining the 2020 US Presidential Election: How to Overcome Political Polarization

Kazuhiro Maeshima (Professor, Faculty of Global Studies, Sophia University)

Joe Biden, a Democrat, won the highly contested 2020 US presidential election. The election was decided by the “swing states” whose swing in each presidential election determines the winner between the Republican and Democratic parties. Of these hotly contested states, Trump managed to hold on to Ohio, but Biden won in the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin as well as in Arizona and Georgia by small margins. As the exit polls show, this election, like its 2016 antecedent, was marked by significant political polarization. The division of the country has clearly continued since the inauguration of the Biden administration, and it is difficult to see a way out of this partisan crisis. The Biden administration has been using fiscal adjustment and other aggressive measures, and it could conceivably concentrate on diplomacy that can be carried out on the president’s authority without congressional approval if the administration finds itself unable to maneuver due to polarization.

2 The Biden Administration and Congress: What Is Really Unusual?

Shunta Matsumoto (Professor of Political Science, Faculty of Law, Meijo University)

This paper discusses the current status and prospects of the Biden administration’s relationship with Congress by examining the question “can Biden realize historic legislation?” Two points are discussed in this paper. First, much of what is happening now can be explained based on basic knowledge on American politics, including the political system centered on the US Constitution, the workings on the “Modern Presidency” and the long-term polarization of the two major parties.

Viewed from this perspective, the Biden administration is unlikely to achieve any historic legislation. This is because Congressional Republicans are united against the Biden administration and Democrats. Second, however, what is truly unusual and hard to predict is the future of Donald Trump. This will determine the behavior of Republican lawmakers and their leaders, and the level of Republican unity in Congress, which could impact the performance of the Biden administration and the outcome of the 2024 presidential election.

3 A Possible Paradigm Change in American Politics: The Democratic Left and the Biden Administration

Toru Umezaki (Professor, Faculty of Letters, Ferris University)

The voices of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren as well as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the other young lawmakers of the “Squad” are resonating loudly. What impact could they have on Biden’s policies? Nearly 40 years after the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, American politics seems to be undergoing a major paradigm shift. Both those who call themselves democratic socialists and those who believe in capitalism insist on expanding the authority and role of the federal government in the American economy and society. They actively address inequality, racial injustice and environmental issues. The Green New Deal, which initially seemed infeasible, now overlaps with the basic principles of the sweeping economic policy of the Biden administration. Backed by the tradition of social movements calling for radical changes in American society, leftist lawmakers seem to have ushered in a new era of “big government.” However, this represents not so much a return to the 20th century as the creation of a 21st-century paradigm.

4 Will the Republican Party’s Trumpization Be Stopped?

Hirota Inoue (Associate Professor, Faculty of Intercultural Studies, Kobe University)

This paper examines whether Republicans will continue to rely on Trump or distance themselves from him now that he has left office, focusing on several cases before, during, and after his presidency. First, the paper uses the memories of former House Speaker John Boehner to make clear that the transformation of the Republican Party was already underway even before Trump took office. Next, after describing criticisms from Republican senators over Trump’s remarks on the August 2017 clash between far-right groups and opponents in Charlottesville, Virginia, the paper points out the fact that Republican senators who were highly critical of Trump have ended their careers in politics one after another in the changing political situation. Finally, the paper takes up as an important case Ohio’s 2022 US Senate Race for Republicans to find that all the leading GOP candidates hoping to succeed the retiring moderate Republican senator have expressed strong support for Trump. After studying these cases, the paper concludes that the Trumpization of the Republican Party has not yet stopped.

5 The Biden Administration: A Coalition Approach in the Indo-Pacific

Sheila A. Smith (Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations)

The Biden administration has swiftly demonstrated that its strategy for the Indo-Pacific involves collaborating with regional allies, especially the Quad. Early visits by Biden officials to Japan, South Korea, and India have been punctuated with strong language about the threat China poses. China, meanwhile, has vocally disapproved of this approach. Efforts by the Biden administration to foster a linkage between coalition members could prove a powerful force, but it will face pushback from China and scrutiny from allies. The Biden administration will need to consistently signal the importance of strong relations with U.S. allies.