

Tabadlab Policy Roundtable 17 – U.S Foreign Policy in Transition

Policy Brief

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfaj56WSVE0&t=1s>

The U.S. Elections have come at a complex time in international relations as several major global trends are at critical junctures involving the U.S. China competition, the increasing role of technology in foreign policy, the importance of public health, and the wider overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For Pakistan and the South Asia region, the future of the Afghanistan conflict and the nature of US relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia necessitate important questions about how the Biden administration will navigate the challenges of a post-Trump international order. In keeping with Tabadlab’s consistent effort to engage important policy voices and try to understand key issues, Tabadlab Policy Roundtable 17 seeks to explore all of these questions with an august group of panelists.



Jonah Blank
Author, Former South & Southeast Asia Policy Director on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Robin L. Raphel
Former US Diplomat, Lobbyist, Ambassador



Matt Duss
American Political Activist and Foreign Policy Advisor for Senator Bernie Sanders

Recommendations

- Address domestic policy issues in order to strengthen the effectiveness of foreign policy
- Find a balance between competition and cooperation with global leaders like China
- Increase political, economic, and diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan and ensure that the Afghan peace process is not disrupted or prolonged
- Commit to diplomatic engagement with Iran and ease rising tensions between actors in the Middle East
- Strengthen relationships with both India and Pakistan while maintaining clarity about interregional conflicts
- Restore the U.S. relationship with Europe
- Regulate big tech through policy and commit to promoting liberal democracy both online and on-the-ground

Discussion Summary

● Biden’s Foreign Policy Direction

How will domestic issues and Biden’s own political leanings impact the direction of his administration’s foreign policy? While U.S. progressives believe it is crucial to address domestic issues such as polarization, the COVID-19 pandemic, and white supremacy in order to have a robust and effective foreign policy, it is likely that Biden will try to reassert U.S. authority in the international domain and prioritize foreign policy. The Biden administration will try to have a bipartisan foreign policy wherever possible in a way that is both driven by realism and human rights values.

● US-China Relations

The past decade has seen the rise of China as a global leader and a main focus in the foreign policy community. Our participants discuss how Trump laid bare several concerns about China in a manner that has paved the way for the next administration to openly recognize the set of challenges that China represents in a responsible manner. Although the U.S. needs to reclaim ceded ground and compete with China in the domain of global infrastructure, cooperation is also required for matters such as climate change and future pandemics.

● The Afghan Peace Process

Will the U.S. Elections stall the Afghan peace negotiations? Our panelists recall how Biden has been consistent in his beliefs that the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan has failed and that tensions in the region cannot be solved by military intervention. The Biden administration has demonstrated a commitment to end prolonged war in a manner that both increases stability and ensures a robust political, economic, and diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan. However, the manner in which U.S. troops will disengage and whether or not American policy will leave an impact in Afghanistan remains uncertain.

● U.S. Policy in the Middle East

Our roundtable discusses future U.S. relations with Iran, Saudi, and Israel. Biden’s commitment to rejoin the JCPOA, to obtain an improved version of the Iran nuclear deal, and to seek broader diplomatic engagement with Iran has also been shared by other Democratic candidates. Countries like the U.A.E. and Israel may attempt to prevent U.S. diplomacy with Iran, but the U.S. commitment to engagement with Iran will prove a litmus test for progressives.

● The Kashmir Conflict

What stance on Kashmir can we expect from a Biden administration? The Trump presidency handled the rise of Indo-Pak tensions and regional instability in Kashmir in a manner that lacked clarity. While it is expected that the U.S. administration will continue to facilitate as opposed to mediate international conflict, the Biden administration may signal to India that recent developments in Kashmir have not been consistent with American values. Furthermore, it is anticipated that Biden will try to maintain strong relationships with both India and Pakistan.

● The U.S. and Europe

Several trends in Europe, such as Britain’s exit from the EU and the rise of neo-centrism in France raise questions about how a Biden presidency will approach Europe. During the last decade, Europe has begun to feel the need to promote its own interests and independence, a need that was exacerbated during the Trump administration. Biden sees reestablishing the transatlantic relationship as a priority now that Europe begins to recognize itself as a bloc that is coequal with America.

● Technology and International Relations

It is important to consider how countries, not just the U.S.’s adversaries, broadly use social media and how platforms like Facebook influence on-the-ground politics across the globe. There has been a rise of illiberal leaders promoting exclusivist politics through the use of social media, which has influenced the rise of authoritarianism. A Biden administration must both grapple with the influence of big tech through regulations and stand behind promoting liberal democracy and human rights.