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**IS AMERICA
TRULY BACK?
IF SO, WHAT'S NEXT?**

IS AMERICA
TRULY BACK?
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TO OUR READERS

This is the second issue of the Journal of Frontline Democracy, a publication of the Economic Policy Research Center and the Fukuyama Democracy Frontline Center. We are happy to pursue the publication of selected articles that have been written as part of our centers' research and analysis work. In this volume, foreign policy professionals and scholars offer their views on the implications of the Biden administration's new approaches for Eastern Europe and Black Sea region in particular.

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INTRODUCTION

Is America Truly Back? If So, What's Next?

"I speak today as President of the United States at the very start of my administration, and I'm sending a clear message to the world: America is back. The transatlantic alliance is back. And we are not looking backward; we are looking forward, together." Those were the opening remarks from President Joe Biden's speech for the virtual Munich Security Conference delivered February 19. The theme that America is back has been a common one among Biden administration officials. After four difficult years under the Trump administration in which some allies were treated worse than some enemies and trans-Atlantic relations came under serious strain, the new Biden team is eager to signal to the world that America's friends will be treated accordingly and America's adversaries had better watch out.

Two months into a new administration in Washington is too soon to draw conclusions. This is especially true when the only Senate-confirmed person at the State Department is the Secretary of State, Antony Blinken. Many key positions remain to be filled, and who assumes which seat will tell a lot about the foreign policy direction of the Biden administration. In this latest set of essays published by EPRC, experts analyze the new American administration and offer forecasts of how U.S. policy might apply to the region.

David J. Kramer finds encouragement in the people whom Biden has picked so far, from Blinken as Secretary of State and Jake Sullivan as National Security Advisor to Avril Haines as Director of National Intelligence and William Burns as Director of the CIA. As Kramer notes, "Biden will need this roster of solid talent in the foreign policy realm, since he won't simply be able to focus on domestic issues first and later turn to national security. The world just doesn't work that way – there is no pause button for Biden to hit to ask the rest of the world to wait while the United States fixes its internal problems."

Biden, Kramer adds, likes to say that the United States must not only lead by the example of its power but by the power of its example. Fixing a badly damaged trans-Atlantic relationship will be near the top of Biden's foreign policy list, along with China, Iran, North Korea and climate change. It remains to be seen whether he can convince European allies to join a tougher line toward Moscow; the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, for example, which Germany supports and the United States opposes, poses an immediate test on this front.

Lilia Shevtsova, in her essay, offers a sobering outlook for U.S.-Russian relations. In light of Biden's recent comment agreeing with the notion that Putin is a "killer", the relationship between the two leaders is likely to be frosty at best. "The relationship with America is for Russia the systemic factor supporting its Great Power status," she writes, suggesting that the Putin regime, despite serious differences, will continue to look toward Washington. "Russia needs the United States of America one way or another," she adds.

Shevtsova highlights one of the main paradoxes of the U.S.-Russia relationship. On the one hand, Russia views the United States with hostility while on the other hand "the America-centrist state depends on American attention!" This paradox, she adds, underscores "the incompatibility of the two countries' systems" and "makes their competition and even hostility inevitable." That leads her to think that "the most viable goal for the United States and Russia could be managing mutual distrust." With such an agenda, she concludes, neither side should expect major breakthroughs; in fact, it "lacks ambition and does not promise any serious breakthroughs."

One breakthrough, however, came in Biden's second week in office when he and Putin agreed to extend the New START Treaty for another five years. John Tefft, former Ambassador to Georgia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia, cites this as an example of the new American administration's "readiness to engage with Russia in promoting greater strategic stability, while at the same time candidly raising problems that have plunged relations between Washington and Moscow to their lowest level since the depths of the Cold War." The relationship is sure to be tested further after U.S. sanctions were imposed for the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Aleksei Navalny, part of the administration's stated commitment to speak out forcefully about the "increasingly brutal repression" inside Russia.

Tefft notes the emphasis that Biden placed in his first phone call with Putin on firmly supporting Ukraine's sovereignty as a "sign that Biden and his team will continue to resist Russian aggression against its neighbors." Tefft goes on to review Biden's history as a senator and vice president when it comes to the region, specifically Ukraine and Georgia. "Biden's engagement with the Black Sea and Caucasus regions is deep and personal. He knows the region far better than any previous American President," Tefft writes.

Ian Kelly, another former Ambassador to Tbilisi and to the OSCE, makes the case for why the Biden administration should advocate for NATO membership for Georgia, a cause not likely to sit well in Moscow, of course. "The Biden

administration is positioning itself to be the most forward-leaning on the issue of NATO enlargement since the Bush 43 administration. This is good news for the overwhelming number of Georgians who support closer relations with and membership in NATO," Kelly writes. "On the military side Georgia long ago proved it can be a net contributor to alliance security."

Kelly acknowledges the serious challenges that lie ahead to seeing such a vision come to fruition. "Perhaps the biggest obstacle to gaining consensus for Georgia's NATO membership is the threat of further Russian aggression," he writes. "Right now, Russia has learned that all it has to do to block the NATO aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine is to invade and occupy those countries' sovereign territory... This kind of veto by an outside power is remarkably debilitating to the alliance's credibility, particularly to its open-door policy. It is in the interests of both members and aspirants that a way be found to overcome this virtual veto." Kelly adds that Georgia's political crisis could pose an additional obstacle to pursuing Euro-Atlantic integration.

Irina Arabidze provides a useful reminder of American policies from the past that prioritized relations with Russia over those with other countries in the region like Georgia and Ukraine. Recalling the open letter published to the Obama administration in 2009 by former political leaders and intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe including Valdas Adamkus, Vaclav Havel, and Lech Walesa, Arabidze worries about the lack of a "unified transatlantic policy for deterring Russia," which, she argues, "remains the biggest opponent of Europe whole, free and at peace."

She goes on to lament the absence of American engagement in the region in recent times. "The weakening of America's role in our region is evidenced by the events in Nagorno Karabakh last year. The peace agreement was concluded in the absence of two Western negotiators, the United States and France... The dispute was solved by an agreement between local powers and an authoritarian model of solving conflicts gained credence." The Biden administration, she says, needs to "strengthen its deterrence policy towards Russia and translate this policy into concrete actions," including through a beefed-up military presence in Europe and the region.

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**THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION:
FACING CHALLENGES GALORE
AT HOME AND ABROAD**

DAVID J. KRAMER

David J. Kramer

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January 20, 2021 marked a new chapter in America. The inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States brought a sense of relief among a wide swath of the American population. In his inaugural address that day, Biden stressed the theme of unity, arguing that together, the United States can confront its many challenges and accomplish great things.

The challenges are daunting. They start with the coronavirus pandemic that continues to exact a staggering toll in infections – more than 25 million cases in the United States alone – and deaths – expected to reach 500,000 by the end of February. The pandemic, of course, has taken a major toll on the economy, which will not be able to recover in a serious way until the virus is brought under control. Inequality, racial tensions, white extremism and polarization also remain high on the list of challenges.

The Biden administration entered office having inherited a multitude of problems. To address some of the most urgent needs, Biden has signed more than 100 executive orders and directives on issues from fighting the pandemic and overturning the Muslim travel ban to ending construction of the border wall and rejoining the Paris climate accord and the World Health Organization. Many of these steps reflect campaign promises intent on undoing much of Donald Trump's agenda.

Trump himself, however, has not gone away. Despite being booted off social media platforms, Trump continues to exercise considerable influence over the Republican Party from his new home in Florida. Hinting at another run for president in 2024, Trump remains the focus of much media attention.

Few Republican members of Congress dare to cross him. Ten House Republicans, in true profiles in courage, supported impeaching Trump, but they already are paying a political price from within their own party with calls for their removal and resignation. That impeachment is the second time the House of Representatives took such action against Trump. The first time last year was for his efforts to abuse his position to pressure a foreign government, Ukraine, to interfere in the 2020 election against Biden. The more recent time was because of his incitement of an insurrection on the Capitol on January 6.

No other public official in U.S. history has ever been impeached twice. Only one Republican Senator, Mitt Romney, voted to convict Trump last year in the Senate trial. This time, several more may join in voting to convict, but the majority of Senate Republicans appears unlikely to convict out of fear that Trump will target

them for turning on him. To convict Trump and disqualify him for a future run for office, 17 Republican Senators would need to join their Democratic colleagues. As this goes to print, that appears exceedingly unlikely.

The Republican Party has other problems as well. Some new members of Congress such as Marjorie Taylor Greene from Georgia and Lauren Boebert from Colorado have become lightning rods for their inflammatory and threatening tweets, comments and actions. While some Democratic members in the House of Representatives are calling for their expulsion, the Republican leadership, including Kevin McCarthy, show little interest in picking fights with this extremist wing of the party. Instead, McCarthy traveled to Mar-a-Largo in late January to pay his respects to and stay in the good graces of Trump.

The turmoil in the Republican Party, however, should not detract from the encouraging start of the Biden presidency. President Biden nominated many highly competent and qualified professionals to fill key government positions. Their confirmation by the Senate, after a slow start, is finally moving ahead. Antony Blinken, who was confirmed by the Senate to be Secretary of State, is a highly respected expert and policymaker with experience in Congress as the key staffer to Biden when he was a Senator and chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, and as Deputy Secretary of State in the Barack Obama administration.

Jake Sullivan also brings strong credentials to his new position as Biden's national security adviser. Retired General Lloyd Austin, confirmed to be Secretary of Defense, is a little less known but has an impressive track record from his service in the military. Janet Yellen brings an excellent reputation to her new position as Secretary of the Treasury. Those chosen to head the various intelligence agencies – Avril Haynes as Director of National Intelligence and William Burns to be CIA Director – are highly regarded.

Biden will need this roster of solid talent in the foreign policy realm, since he won't simply be able to focus on domestic issues first and later turn to national security. The world just doesn't work that way – there is no pause button for Biden to hit to ask the rest of the world to wait while the United States fixes its internal problems. That would take years anyway. Biden will have to confront both domestic and foreign policy issues at the same time.

Biden likes to say that the United States must not only lead by the example of its power but by the power of its example. And yet many wonder whether the "shining city on the hill," as Ronald Reagan famously said about the United States,

has lost some of that shine. There is no doubt that events of the last few years, and especially of the last few months, culminating in the deadly storming January 6 of the U.S. Capitol, in which five people were killed, has dulled the shine.

But it is important to remember that hours after the Capitol was overrun by an insurrectionist mob, members of the House and Senate, along with then-Vice President Mike Pence, returned to finish their job of certifying the results of the election. Exactly two weeks after a mob overwhelmed police and security to attack the Capitol, that same setting served as the location where Biden and his Vice President Kamala Harris, were sworn into office. The contrast is stunning, and it speaks to the resilience of American institutions. Still, one should not be complacent about the sturdiness of our system; after all, the rioters came within minutes, if not seconds, of storming the House and Senate chambers just before members, including then-Vice President Mike Pence and House speaker Nancy Pelosi, were evacuated to safety. As awful as the riot was, it could have been far worse.

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

In addition to all the internal challenges facing Biden, he assumes office with the reputation of the United States in tatters. According to a new poll of 11 countries conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations, a majority of Europeans are happy with Biden's election victory — but many (32 percent) say that, after Trump, Americans can no longer be trusted. Only 27 percent disagreed with that statement. Fifty-three percent of German respondents said Americans couldn't be trusted, versus 35 percent of Britons. In France, the most popular answer was "don't know."

Overall, more than 60 percent of respondents — including 81 percent of Britons, 71 percent of Germans, and 66 percent of the French — said the American political system is "completely" or "somewhat broken." Some six in ten surveyed think China will become more powerful than the United States over the next decade. Only in Hungary and Poland, where the leaders carried favor with former Trump, is there a more positive than negative view toward the United States. Restoring the standing of the United States is a top priority of Blinken and Biden, but it will not happen overnight.

To be clear, the image of the United States has been in decline for years. Unhappiness with the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq started this trend. While Obama was viewed very favorably in Europe when he was elected president in 2008, his "pivot" to Asia was not well received on the Continent, and there was a general sense that Europe was considered less important to America than it had been in the past. It was during Trump's tenure that attitudes in Europe took their steepest declines.

Accordingly, it should be no surprise that many in Europe were relieved and even ecstatic that Biden won last November. After all, over the past four years, Trump denigrated America's allies in Europe, with personal attacks on a range of leaders. The scene captured on camera of Trump rudely pushing Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic out of his way at a NATO gathering in 2017 encapsulated Trump's treatment of America's European allies. He characterized the European Union as one of America's biggest "foes" and sowed doubts about the U.S. commitment to NATO. It is no wonder that Europeans, with transatlantic relations at their lowest point in a long time, are ecstatic to see Trump gone and Biden coming in.

But recent actions and behavior by the European Union and specific European governments suggest that they think it is the United States alone that has to atone for its recent trespasses. The relationship requires give and take on both sides. In fact, the Europeans have work to do if they want to repair relations with the United States. Recent developments do not bode well on this front.

For instance, the trade deal with China reached last December suggests the EU places mercantilism above principles, given the egregious human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government against the Uyghurs and its ugly crackdown against the citizens of Hong Kong. At the same time that the EU adopts an accommodating stance toward the Communist Party-run leadership in Beijing, Chinese authorities continue to block any investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic and flex their muscles toward countries in Asia, most notably Taiwan. Making matters worse, several European countries, most notably Germany, seem willing to accept Huawei's 5G network into their countries despite strong pressure from the United States to abandon such pursuits because of security and surveillance concerns.

Europeans are making a serious mistake if they think it was only the Trump administration that favored a tougher line toward Beijing. Many Democrats agree that the time has come to push back against the Chinese Communist Party. Thus,

China looms as a major irritant in U.S.-EU relations, and Europe is making the situation worse with its craven approach.

Then there's the issue of NATO and defense spending. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in an interview with the Washington Post, "There is a need to rebuild trust between Europe and the United States. I don't believe in 'America alone.' I don't believe in 'Europe alone.' I believe in North America and Europe together." Acknowledging tensions with the previous U.S. administration, Stoltenberg said, "It is no secret that we had, I had, difficult discussions with him [Trump] on issues ranging from arms control, Russia, burden sharing and many other issues." And yet some of these issues are not going away with a new administration in Washington, even if the tone and approach will be very different.

In 2006, all NATO members committed to spend at least two percent of their GDP on defense by 2024. To date, only eight European allies, along with the United States, have fulfilled this pledge; six of those eight joined the Alliance within the last 21 years. American criticism of this perceived free-riding by many Alliance members will continue under the Biden administration, albeit with more cajoling than badgering that characterized Trump's approach.

Another irritant in transatlantic relations is the recent decision of the European Union to no longer recognize Juan Guaido as the legitimate leader of Venezuela following fraudulent legislative elections organized by the discredited Nicolas Maduro last December. This unforced and unprincipled error involving a country in the Western hemisphere will not go over well in Washington.

The new U.S. administration has announced its return to the Paris Climate Accords and the World Health Organization. Reengaging in international bodies will be a key foreign policy objective; withdrawal had opened these agencies to Chinese exploitation and manipulation in the absence of the United States and alienated partners in Europe. Biden also has made clear his interest in returning to the nuclear deal with Iran from which the Trump administration withdrew. On this, the EU and certain member states can play a critical role, especially since many Republicans in Washington will resist such a move.

The controversial and nearly completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline going directly from Russia to Germany, obviating the need for Russian gas to transit through Ukraine and deepening European dependence on Russia, is another source of friction, not just between the United States and Europe but within Europe itself. The European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in late 2018 to condemn Nord

Stream 2 as “a political project that poses a threat to European energy security”; it voted again this year to end the project after the poisoning and arrest of Russian opposition leader Aleksei Navalny. The U.S. Congress joined the Trump administration in opposing the pipeline, to include mandating sanctions for companies and others involved in its construction, which is 90 percent complete.

After the poisoning of Navalny by Russian agents in August, there were hopes that Merkel and the government would cancel the pipeline, but those hopes have vanished. By insisting on completing the pipeline, the German government is creating a source of disagreement not only with the new Biden administration but with the vast majority of the U.S. Congress and with a many fellow Europeans. Such disagreements play right into the hands of Vladimir Putin.

On Navalny, the initial European outraged reaction to his poisoning was encouraging. That has since dissipated, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel resists pressure to cancel Nord Stream 2 and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell plans to visit Moscow for consultations, over the objections of a number of EU member states in the east. Signs that the EU might be softening toward the Putin regime would clash with a tougher approach likely to be adopted by the Biden administration.

On his second day in office, Biden requested his intelligence community to look into Russian interference in America’s elections; the poisoning of Navalny; reports of Russian bounties on American soldiers in Afghanistan; and Russian hacking of American computer systems. In his first phone call with Putin, Biden raised these issues with his Russian counterpart and expressed support for Ukraine. The contrast with Trump’s coddling of Putin could not be starker. Extending the New START treaty is a top arms control priority for the Biden administration, but that should not be interpreted in Europe as the precursor to a softening in Washington toward Moscow.

Indeed, the Biden administration will continue to oppose the Nord Stream 2 pipeline – legislation will not give them a choice anyway. Additional U.S. sanctions over the poisoning of Navalny are likely in the works. And Biden himself will not look to make a new friend in the Kremlin, the unseemly way his predecessor did. With a deteriorating political situation in Russia likely to worsen as Duma elections near in September, it is critical that the United States and European Union stay on the same page toward the Putin regime.

This would entail new sanctions for its ongoing conflict with Ukraine, its illegal use of banned chemical agents against regime opponents, its interference in

European and American domestic politics and elections, and the appalling situation inside Russia itself when it comes to human rights. The West should also put the Kremlin on notice that any overt moves to prop up longtime dictator Alexander Lukashenka would be met with a serious response. Russian occupation of 20 percent of Georgian territory must not be forgotten either, and new approaches should be considered to force Russian to respect all of its neighbors' sovereignty and territorial integrity, and right to orient their foreign policy as they deem fit, without Russian interference.

Both sides of the Atlantic can and should be doing more to fight the raging pandemic and collaborate on vaccine development and distribution. While in the U.S. and Europe the top priority is taking care of one's own citizens, both need to recognize that the Chinese and Russians are looking to fill voids with countries without indigenous production of any vaccine to score political and diplomatic advantage. Washington, Brussels and other European capitals cannot cede the field to authoritarian regimes when it comes to generosity to other countries in need of live-saving medications.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia, of course, is a country in need of such help. It has been devastated in the second wave of the virus after handling the first wave last spring comparatively well. The country's economy also has taken a major hit, with no rebound in sight. Making matters worse, since last October's parliamentary elections, the country has been saddled with a political crisis. The party in power, Georgian Dream, essentially has established monopoly control over the parliament following an opposition boycott over claims that the election was fraudulent. Western efforts to mediate a compromise have failed, and Georgia's image as an island of democracy amid a sea of authoritarianism has taken a hit.

Nonetheless, support for Georgia should be high on the list for the new Biden administration as it determines its policy priorities toward Europe. Longstanding close ties between Georgia and the United States combined with the country's strongly pro-American population and unstinting determination to integrate into

the Euro-Atlantic community, make it deserving of such support, notwithstanding the current political crisis playing out in Tbilisi.

Together with former U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Ian Kelly, this author has produced a report that will be released in February under the auspices of the Economic Policy Research Center and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. The report makes the case for why the new American administration should support Georgia – and also what Georgia should do to make an even stronger case for such support. These challenging times demand that Georgia and the United States work more closely together.

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RUSSIA AND AMERICA: HOW TO MANAGE MUTUAL HOSTILITY?

LILIA SHEVTSOVA



In certain respects, it didn't matter to Moscow who the winner would be in the U.S. presidential election. Russia needs the United States of America one way or another. The bitter irony is that the United States not only helped the Soviet Union to become the main powerful opponent by supporting the building of the Soviet economy in the 1930-s¹ – it is helping the Russian system to reproduce itself today. The relationship with America is for Russia the systemic factor supporting its Great Power status. This status has been the spine of the Russian system of personalized power, the means to legitimize the political leadership, and the instrument to distract Russians' attention from their domestic woes.

Russia is viewing the world through the lens of the relationship with the U.S. This presents an amusing paradox: a civilization hostile to the U.S. at the same time that the America-centrist state depends on American attention!

RUSSIA'S DUAL TRACK

Starting with the Soviet times, Russia has developed a dual track model of relations with the U.S.: "Containment and dialogue". Depending on various determinants, Moscow has been pressing either the "containment" or the "dialogue" button.

The worst for the Russian System is not confrontation with the U.S. – it is being ignored and brushed aside by the United States. The asymmetry of economic and military resources at their disposal (with the exception of nuclear weapons) makes the arms control dialogue the key guarantee of Russia's Great power status. President Barack Obama was the first U.S. president who disparaged Russia as merely "a regional power," starting the process of downgrading Russia's geopolitical ambitions; that trend continued under Trump. President Donald Trump, perhaps unintentionally, delivered a new painful blow to the Russian system by ignoring bipolarity with Moscow, trying to weaken Russia's "energy role" in Europe, and disbanding the arms control regime.

The Kremlin is waiting for President Biden's team to lay out its Russia agenda and watching the unfolding American debate. This became a tradition with a new leader in Washington as the so-called "Russia hands" start "reimagining" the bilateral relationship. In fact, every time the efforts end with frustration.

¹ *Two thirds of the Soviet enterprises were built with the help of the U.S.*

This time one could observe near unanimity in Russia regarding the future relations with the United States. A new administration in Washington was usually welcomed in Moscow with hopes for a fresh start. This time Moscow doubts that under President Biden the relationship will improve. The U.S. and Russia January agreement to extend the New START nuclear nonproliferation treaty by five years does not change prevailing in Moscow pessimism.

The Russian experts (both pro-Kremlin and anti-Kremlin) have no doubts that “adversarial rivalry and cost imposition” will be the “new normal.” Countering U.S. capabilities “will be the utmost priority” the Kremlin.² Moreover, the chaotic end of Trump’s presidency, with the mob storming the Capitol on January 6, has created in Russia an impression that America’s domestic problems will weaken its geopolitical role.

The American debate looks more diverse, and one can see an influential camp of pragmatists who hope that cooperation could be resumed.³

CHANCES FOR COOPERATION

The history of the U.S.-Russian relationship suggests that the incompatibility of the two countries’ systems makes their competition and even hostility inevitable. Cooperation in this context appears to be abnormal; confrontation, on the other hand, seems to be the “norm”. And yet there is an irresistible question that must be asked: could both sides pursue cooperation if the U.S. drops topics that irritate Russia?

Putting aside the likelihood that Washington would adopt such an approach, there is reason to think the answer is “yes”. The impression in Moscow, and elsewhere for that matter, is that the days when “neoliberalism” and “liberal internationalism” prevailed in the international order are over. The U.S. have been retrenching. Global challenges have emerged, with the coronavirus pandemic topping the list and

2 www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/01/04/foreign-policy-experts-map-russias-plans-for-2021-a72365

3 *The pragmatists say, “We need cooperation... the stakes are so high”*. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/05/open-letter-russia-policy-391434>
It’s Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy

demanding collective efforts of all states, irrespective of their regimes. As Walter Russell Mead said, "Saving the planet from a climate catastrophe and building a coalition to counter China are causes that many Wilsonians will agree both require and justify a certain lack of scrupulosity when it comes to the choice of both allies and tactics."⁴ Hence, cooperation with Putin's Russia seems to be justified for the sake of possible cooperation by sidelining issues that irritate the Kremlin.

Such an approach will be welcomed by the Kremlin. But adopting this approach by the new Biden administration would mean rejecting by the America's normative tradition. Moscow would need from the White House not only silence on the issues that it can't stomach (like human rights), but other concessions, too. The most obvious one would involvethe source of serious confrontation between Russia and the West. Moscow would expect from the U.S. pressure on Kyiv to abandon its hopes for NATO membership and recognition of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Naïve are the hopes that Moscow will be ready to leave Donbas unconditionally. On the contrary, Moscow will demand special status for Donbas that would preserve its loyalty to Moscow. The U.S. would be expected to persuade Europe to support this deal and the abrogation of sanctions against Russia after Moscow would allow return to Ukraine control over its eastern border. Would Ukraine agree to this trade off? Hardly. Incorporation of pro- Russia Donbas into the Ukrainian state would undermine it from inside. As for Moscow, it would not agree to limit its demands. If Washington wants a deal, it would have to accept the Kremlin scenario. And that seems extremely unlikely with the new team in Washington. Neither President Biden nor anyone on his team is likely to recommend such an approach, so anyone in Moscow dreaming of such a scenario needs to wake up.

Nonetheless, for the sake of this mental exercise, the Americans, in turn, could anticipate that Russia would admit to meddling in the U.S. elections and promise never to do it again. That, too, would never happen. After all, the Kremlin motto is: Never admit any wrongdoing! Could Moscow pledge to stop harassing the neighboring states? It could. Will it follow its pledge? Hardly. True, Russia is losing its control over the post-Soviet space. The U.S. would have to decide which actor they would prefer to see increase its leverage in this area: China, Turkey, Iran? In the end, the U.S. could conclude that Russia is preferable. I guess it's an unpalatable choice for the new administration to make.

Deliberating on cooperation, we have to take into account the mentality of the

⁴ *Walter Russell Mead, The End of the Wilsonian Era. Why Liberal Internationalism Failed, The Foreign Affairs, January/February 2021*

Russian ruling class based on the principle: “Kto kogo?” This principle means fighting until the opponent is crushed. Moreover, for Moscow, U.S. concessions would symbolize weakness that will need to be explored – but that reinforces the bet that such concessions will not be forthcoming.

In lieu of such concessions, U.S. attempts to neutralize Russia’s assertiveness through including Moscow into multi-lateral talks would hardly be welcomed in Moscow; multilateralism would downgrade Russia’s role.

The American pragmatists call for reassessment of the old ideological legacy: “We need ... to minimize the misperceptions and miscalculations,” they argue.⁵ This means that Moscow has to reject the axioms that constitute its foreign policy doctrine, like the threat of NATO; the mantra that the West is “humiliating Russia”; and the belief that Russia has the right to assert its sphere of influence. Just as the Biden administration is unlikely to make the concessions Moscow wants to see, the Kremlin leadership is not going to break the spine of the Russian system by making concessions the United States might like to see.

Notwithstanding such obstacles, there were times of successful ties between Russia and the America. Indeed, during the Gorbachev, Yeltsin and early Putin leaderships, the Soviet Union/Russia pursued cooperation and even partnership with the United States. But one needs to see the Kremlin’s motives behind its friendliness and understand how the Soviet system ended. In Gorbachev’s case, it boiled down to his understanding of the Soviet failure to compete with the U.S. and his decision to open the USSR to the world. However, this openness accelerated the unraveling of the Soviet Union, which had been glued together by militarism and hostility toward the West.

Yeltsin tried to get U.S. support for the economic transformation of the country, which was experiencing a meltdown. From a friendly position toward the end of the 1990’s, he returned to antagonistic relations suspicion in June 1999 with his “Pristina march” in Yugoslavia that nearly sparked military conflict between Russian paratroopers and NATO forces. Putin, by offering President Bush assistance in the war against international terrorism in 2001, wanted to use the antiterrorist struggle for consolidation of his rule. He returned to the confrontational mood when he understood that Washington was not ready for bipolarity. Putin also had to learn from Gorbachev’s experience: if he wanted to preserve his one –man rule indefinitely, he had to contain the West. Anti-Americanism worked better to justify Putin’s personalized power than embraces with America.

5 *Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy...*

THE ASSESSMENTS THAT CONFUSE

The basic assessments used by the proponents of the U.S.-Russia cooperation, whom I describe as pragmatists, provoke consternation. They agree that confrontation between the two sides is “not a product of misunderstandings or disagreements between leaders that could be overcome through better dialogue.” Instead, confrontation is “systemic,” they argue.⁶ Pragmatists agree that both sides are “bitterly divided by visions of world order, geopolitical interests, and values.”⁷ They admit, that Russia “challenges our role as a global leader and the world order we helped build. It interferes in our (the U.S.-L.S) domestic politics to exacerbate divisions and tarnish our democratic reputation.”⁸ How justified in this context would be hope for a sustainable cooperation? Moreover, pragmatists confirm that both sides can’t alter their domestic order or “capitulate on its vital interests.” I will remind our readers that for Putin’s Russia, “vital interest” means weakening of the United States. How then could the proponents of cooperation expect both sides to cooperate!?

The terminology that the U.S. pragmatists are using also raises questions. They formulate their preferential model in the following way: “At best, our relations will remain a mix of competition and cooperation. The policy challenge will be to strike the most beneficial and safest balance between the two.”

For starters, the term “competition” is confusing. “Competition” means Russia and America are trying to be the best and most effective. In which areas? One would assume in the economic realm and in the arena of ideas. But Russia has abandoned such attempts with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin’s Russia is trying to survive, adjusting to the system decay. Even with all of its problems, the United States is not heading toward decay! Competition in militarization? This means that both sides try to contain each other through military means. Containment presupposes a different modality than competition.

The term “rivalry” doesn’t capture the situation, because it demands symmetry of resources. The term “confrontation” also misses the point. “Confrontation” is the means to achieve a certain goal. In the U.S.-Russia context, the goal is mutual restraint.

One could guess why the pragmatists prefer to use the term “competition” – it

6 *Dmitry Trenin and Thomas Graham, How to safely manage the Us-Russia Great-Power Competition, carnegie.ru/commentary/83432*

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy*

gives hope for “cooperation”. By contrast, the term “containment” does not leave much space even for dialogue.

Hope for a “beneficial” relationship appears to be the same rhetorical trick. What is beneficial for the U.S. will not be beneficial for Russia. The biggest benefit for the Kremlin will be the U.S. going down in flames.

Apparently, the expectation of the “beneficial” cooperation stems from the American belief in rationality: Russians have to stop being reckless because it creates lots of problems and comes at considerable cost. The problem is that the Russian system has different “rationality” - it can’t allow itself to be friendly with its geopolitical opponent because rejection of animosity could bring melting of its survival mechanism based on the “enemy search”.

The pragmatists stubbornly believe that the threat of nuclear war could force both sides to cooperate. However, this threat looks rather dim because neither side is suicidal. Meanwhile, there are systemic problems that push the opponents to prefer containment to cooperation. For instance, preserving the anti-American mobilization for the Kremlin is more important for domestic political reasons than dialogue with the United States.

WHAT THE NORMATIVE AGENDA BRINGS

To be clear, the normative approach to U.S.-Russian relations means the United States makes dialogue and progress on issues conditional on the Kremlin’s readiness to respect human rights inside Russia and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors.⁹ With an America beset by its own turmoil, could one expect the administration in Washington to pursue a “normative approach” in relations? The dramatic end of Trump’s presidency casts doubts about America’s ability to remain a country based on “the rule of law” and able to promote democratic standards for the world.

For the sake of argument, let’s imagine that America has undergone a normative lobotomy - and signals a readiness to pursue a relationship with Russia only if

9 www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/11/russia-reset-response-open-letter-393176

Moscow stops seeing the West as an enemy and rejects aggressiveness.

Indeed, more hardline approach by the United States course could force Moscow to pursue a more cautious foreign policy. However, the Russian system can't stop viewing the U.S. as an enemy – unless this system is transformed. A policy of U.S. containment could force the Kremlin to diversify its policy kit and explore more astute means of expansion and power projection. The Kremlin can't reject seeking control over its neighborhood – this would mean losing the image of the powerful actor, essential for domestic control.

The Russian system would reciprocate with a massive crackdown on the Russian civil society and opposition. A taste of this came on January 23 and January 31 with the repressive methods used against those protesting Russian opposition leader Aleksei Navalny's arrest. Any pressure from outside will be followed by a tightening of the screws internally. Thus, the sad truth is that Russian civil society paradoxically could pay the price for any American pursuit of containment.

The U.S. will have to calibrate its containment in such a way that it would not bury the chances for dialogue on the issues that remain on the U.S.-Russia plate. As history shows, Washington invariably softens its policy in trying to reach compromise with Moscow.

Ignoring Russia or isolating Russia would be an experiment that would force the Kremlin to demonstrate the price of isolation by increasing the level of hostility. Is the U.S. and the West ready for the new "Cold war"?

At the same time, a normative approach by the United States toward Russia could produce results if it is endorsed by the collective West. And yet so far the chances of that are not great, even after the uproar over Navalny's poisoning and subsequent arrest.

PUTIN'S CONSTRUCT PREVENTS TRUST

Russia's traditional adherence to foreign policy assertiveness is not the only factor that impacts its relationship with the U.S. The most powerful factor is Russia's civilizational trajectory and the logic of the Russian System. The Kremlin

has rejected the modernist agenda which means that Russia is ready for a more confrontational relationship with the West that has always been for Russia the supplier of the modernist tools.

Amid worries about the approaching end of Putin's era, the need to prepare the ground for the transfer of power and money to the children of the current ruling group forces the Kremlin to turn to coercion and to insulate the society from external influence. Let's add to this the Belorussian revolution and the Khabarovsk protests that have pushed the Kremlin to undertake preliminary measures to secure control by using repression. The Russian system gradually returns to the "Fortress" mode.

In this situation the enemy search inside and outside becomes the key mobilization instrument. America presents the Ideal Enemy. The Kremlin's domestic needs most probably will outweigh the risks of confrontation.

The assertive Kremlin course is supported by a significant part of the Russian population fed Anti-American "chewing gum". At the end of 2020, 35 per cent of Russian respondents viewed the U.S positively and 51 per cent negatively.¹⁰ About 70 per cent of respondents considered the U.S. as an enemy.¹¹ Trump's America provoked suspicion even among the ordinarily pro-Western segments of Russian society.

The bitter irony is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians viewed the U.S. as a benevolent state. In 1990-1991, about 74 per cent of the Russian respondents said that Russia needs to cooperate first of all with America. About 37 per cent of respondents waited for assistance from America (9 per cent waited for help from Germany). 51 per cent of respondents viewed America as the friendly country and 16 per cent as an ally! Hostility toward the U.S. showed only among 1-2 per cent of the respondents. Amazingly, but 38 per cent of respondents thought cooperation with America was more important than cooperation with the Union of Independent States – only 25 percent prioritized cooperation with the UNS.¹²

10 levada.ru/2020/12/01/otnosheniya-s-ssha-pri-dzhozefe-bajdene/

11 levada.ru/2020/10/15/vragi-2/

12 Денис Волков, Почему в России стали считать США врагом. www.carnegie.ru/commentary/60220

THE NEW CHALLENGES

The new global reality creates unexpected challenges for Russia. What does the U.S. retrenchment mean for Russia? It has to downgrade the U.S. role as Russia's adversary. What country could replace it as the Key Enemy? China will be too dangerous in this role. What about Europe in this regard for Russia?

The Russian mantra about the need for multipolarity could turn into a headache for Moscow, which is not accustomed to several centers of gravity. Russian policy and propaganda are built to oppose the U.S. unipolar world.

Besides, Russia can't afford to slide into the "second echelon." Russia will try to prove its Great Power status – at any price! The population is losing appetite for this role, but the elite and the leadership will need the status to legitimize them.

How will Russia justify its role in the post-Covid world? It hardly will be the traditional "New Yalta" – i.e., territorial expansion, unless the system becomes dysfunctional and starts suicidal statecraft. Russia already has problems with preserving its galaxy: China and Turkey play and compete in the post Soviet space. Ukraine and Moldova will move toward Europe. What is left for Russia? The role of the spoiler and meddling into domestic affairs of neighbors using cyber means and cooptation of the elites – these are today the Russian means in the geopolitical game.

As the experience of the Western former empires proves, the process of adjusting to the less ambitious role for Russia will be painful. This process could bring even more tension with the outside world than the adaptation of post-Communist Russia.

Besides, the process of Russia's adjustment will depend more not on the U.S., but on Europe due to its territorial proximity and economic interest in dealing with the Post-Soviet space.

Does it mean that there is no area for U.S.- Russia dialogue? Of course, there is. But we need to get a sober view of its possibilities.

The incompatibility of the systems can't guarantee their unanimity of view on what are the "common interests". The existence of the global challenges, like the pandemics, could bring restraint in dealing with each other. However, for

the Kremlin, restraint contradicts its self-preservation mode. Any moment the Kremlin concludes that it needs to turn to confrontation, it will do it ignoring the existential threat.

One can't exclude a scenario where Putin's successor will try to pull Russia away from the hostility pattern. Of course, one would wonder how such leader could emerge within the system that has been for decades reproducing anti-Western and ant-American political mentality. Moreover, any leader should remember the destiny of Mikhail Gorbachev who undermined the Soviet Union by rejecting the war paradigm. The liberal minority in Russia- about 15% of population- will not be a strong factor in favor of the pro-American shift.

This shift is feasible if the new Russian elite finds it dangerous to survive through confrontation with the leading Western power. However, such pivot would be possible only as the result of domestic transformation. This means Russia's rejection of the enemy search and militarism as its survival pattern.

As for the United States' impact on Russia, one could see two approaches. The first one is pragmatic: the U.S. pragmatists are convinced that Russia is incorrigible. Thus, the West can't help to reform Russia. The pragmatists say, "We must deal with Russia as it is, not as we wish it to be... An eventual successor, even one more democratically inclined, will likely operate within this same framework. Premising U.S. policy on the assumption that we can and must change that framework is misguided."¹³

One can't avoid the feeling that history repeats itself by turning to fatalism. The West after the collapse of the Soviet Union was convinced about the "end of history" and the victory of liberalism. The Western gurus were declaring the U.S. partnership with Russia and Russia's integration into the West. As it turned out, the belief in liberalism conquering world and Russian integration into the West was premature.

Today the Western experts shifted to the opposite but also fatalistic view. They could be right about Russia's inability to save itself from its history. But they are guessing without knowledge of the Russian reality- even Russian observers have problems understanding it. The pessimists do not take into account the growing demand for change inside the Russia society – they see only the society's inability to turn this demand into a political alternative. However, mass protests over Navalny's arrest upon his return to Moscow in January could accelerate Russia's search for change and the current regime will fail to preserve the current status quo.

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Besides, the posture “take Russia as it is” legitimizes the Russian system and by justifying the acquiescence supports its reproduction. This view also demoralizes the Russian dissenting groups and makes them suspicious of such intentions.

One has to admit that the normative approach with its “democracy promotion” in Russia when the West was helping the Russian civil society and opposition has been exhausted. The Kremlin has erased all channels for such assistance.

But there are three areas where the U.S. and the West could exert indirect transformative influence on Russia. True, this influence could be felt in the perspective.

Firstly, the United States could make the liberal democratic model attractive for Russia and other illiberal states by sorting out its own problems.¹⁴ Worth noting is the possibility that Europe could serve as the model to follow for Russia more than the United States.

Secondly, the United States and Europe could build an external environment around Russia that will demonstrate the benefits of the liberal model, meaning specifically with Russia’s neighbors. This could create impulses for transformations in the post-Soviet space.

Thirdly, fighting kleptocracy and enablers inside of the West will not only restore trust of the Russian society in the Western democracy, but undermine the external resources of the Russian corrupted system.

Of course, one can’t be naïve and believe that America together with its Western allies are ready to build this triad agenda soon. This means that Russia still has an international environment that is helpful for reproduction of its current system.

One hardly could expect from the President Biden a full reassessment of U.S. policy toward Russia; he simply has too many challenges on his plate. Only 12 per cent Russians believe that Russia’s relationship with Biden’s America will become better.¹⁵

14 Arch Puddington, David J. Kramer have elaborated why democracy matters and, more particularly, why liberal democracy is essential to Americans’ economic well-being and to America’s standing in the world which will allow its impact on the illiberal states. Arch Puddington, David J. Kramer, *How Democracy makes America Great*, www.americanpurpose.com/articles/how-democracy-makes-america-great/

15 In November 2020 45 per cent of the Russian respondents said nothing will change in the relationship between Russia and the U.S. after ascendency of President Biden, 30 per cent said the relations will become worse and only 12 per cent believe they will become better. levada.ru/2020/12/01/otnosheniya-s-ssha-pri-dzhozefe-bajdene/

Sooner or later the U.S. will have to deliberate on the constantly escaping goal that turns into a mirage -- building the relationship with Russia that will be constructive in dealing with the global challenges and have a transformative impact on Russia. This would be the ultimate agenda. Meanwhile, more moderate goals could be possible and achievable, namely ending the enabling of reproduction of the Russian personalized system.

For the time being, the most viable goal for the United States and Russia could be managing mutual distrust. This agenda lacks ambition and does not promise any serious breakthroughs. This agenda will need an inventory of root causes of why the relationship constantly returns to hostility. Recognition of the unpleasant inevitability could be more productive than ungrounded hope that ends with delayed disappointment.

We also need to be prepared for the forthcoming moment of truth for Russia: the transition in leadership that could open new possibilities and new challenges.



JOE BIDEN.
RUSSIA, UKRAINE
AND GEORGIA

AMBASSADOR
JOHN F. TEFFT

Ambassador John F. Tefft is a retired United States diplomat. He was a career Foreign Service Officer for more than 45 years, completing his service as the U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation from 2014 to 2017. Prior to that he served as the U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania from 2000 to 2003, Ambassador to Georgia from 2005 to 2009, and Ambassador to Ukraine from 2009 to 2013. He worked from 2004 to 2005 as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs responsible for U.S. relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.

President Joe Biden came to power facing an acute domestic crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic had run rampant over the country and plunged the economy into a deep recession. Biden was clear from the start of his Presidency that dealing with the pandemic, the economy and climate change were his highest priorities. In foreign affairs Biden, his Secretary of State Tony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin initially emphasized the two-fold task of renewing American ties with our allies and friends throughout the world, and addressing the challenge of China which they viewed as the most significant threat facing the United States. These goals were reflected in the Administration's March 2021 "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance" and in Secretary of State Blinken's March 2 speech, "A Foreign Policy for the American People."

Like all newly elected U.S. Administrations, Biden's team initially set about the task of nominating and securing Senate confirmation of Cabinet and sub-Cabinet officials. The Administration also quickly launched internal reviews of key foreign policy problems to inform subsequent policy decisions and initiatives. Given domestic priorities and the overwhelming list of foreign policy issues to be addressed by the new Administration, many analysts wondered how much time and attention the new Administration would be able to focus on the Eurasian region.

The first indication came in Biden's January 26 phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin. They agreed to renew for five years the U.S.-Russian New Start Arms Control Agreement, which had been signed by Presidents Obama and Medvedev in 2011. This relatively easy action signaled a desire to maintain a stable nuclear balance with Russia even as both sides discussed other areas of contention. In that same phone call with Putin, Biden agreed "to explore strategic stability discussions on a range of arms control and emerging security issues." New technologies and weapons, the military buildup of China, and a changing international situation will clearly challenge both sides to find areas where they can find common ground in achieving greater stability in an unstable world.

At the same time, Biden did not shrink in his phone call with Putin from speaking candidly about the problems in U.S.-Russian relations. Biden prominently reaffirmed US support for Ukraine's sovereignty. The Administration backed that up on March 1 by announcing a \$125 million package of security assistance for Ukraine. Biden also raised the Russian Solar Winds hacking attacks with Putin, criticized Russia's poisoning of opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, as well as the repressive tactics Russia used to quell demonstrations protesting Navalny's imprisonment. The Administration joined the European Union on March 2 in

sanctioning seven prominent Russian officials over the Navalny poisoning. Biden's National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has also indicated that the Administration was urgently reviewing the Solar Winds hacking attack, intending to implement a comprehensive list of measures to both punish and deter Russia from further cyberwarfare attacks.

The overall message being conveyed by the Administration in its first communications with Russia seemed to be twofold: a readiness to engage with Russia in promoting greater strategic stability, while at the same time candidly raising problems that have plunged relations between Washington and Moscow to their lowest level since the depths of the Cold War. In separate statements, the Biden Administration has emphasized that it has no intention of launching a "reset" of U.S.-Russian relations as previous Administrations had done. Its early steps indicated a likely policy blend of firm principle and pragmatic implementation.

Whether Biden and his team can make any progress in dealing with Russia, while continuing to speak out forcefully against Russia's continued occupation of Ukrainian territory and increasingly brutal repression at home is an open question. Biden and his team will face a stiff challenge in dealing with Putin's Russia. The Russian leader has rejected Western criticism of Navalny's poisoning, even claiming to French President Macron that Navalny may have poisoned himself. Facing widespread protests of Navalny's imprisonment, the Kremlin claims western interference in Russia's internal affairs. Meanwhile, Russia persists in waging cyberattacks against the U.S. government and businesses. The result of these and other malign actions is that the substantial bipartisan consensus in Washington for a tough policy toward Russia and further sanctions has only grown.

Where will Biden and Blinken put Ukraine, Georgia and other non-Russian republics in their list of foreign policy priorities? The emphasis that Biden placed in his first phone call with Putin on firmly supporting Ukraine's sovereignty is a sign that Biden and his team will continue to resist Russian aggression against its neighbors. A number of experts predict that the Administration will focus more efforts on securing a Russian withdrawal from the Donbas. With Russia still claiming the region as lying within its sphere of influence, Turkey now more deeply engaged in the South Caucasus, and China looking to play a more active economic role, the new Administration will face a more complex mix of issues and players than when the Obama-Biden Administration left power four years ago. A brief look back at Biden's history of engagement with Ukraine and Georgia suggests his likely policy approach.

Biden and his Secretary of State Tony Blinken have long experience in dealing with Ukraine, Georgia, the Black Sea and South Caucasus regions. They have both visited many times, and have worked hard for years to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and Georgia. Biden has repeatedly rejected Russia's claim to a sphere of influence over the countries it regards as in its "Near Abroad," and has sought to bring Ukraine and Georgia into a broader European security and political framework.

Biden and Blinken condemned Russia's invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. They have urged both Ukraine and Georgia to fight corruption and improve the institutions of democracy. They have not hesitated to employ "tough love" in talking with the leaders of both countries about the need to move forward in parallel with both economic development and democracy building. Biden and Blinken have been prepared to use financial aid as a lever to encourage key anti-corruption policies in Ukraine. There is no reason to believe that Biden will change course now that he has become President. Biden can be expected to continue to help Ukraine and Georgia resist Russian attempts at domination and control. He will also likely continue to press for the development of democratic institutions, a serious fight against corruption, and the transparent implementation of genuine rule of law

When Biden was a Senator, he was already engaged in dealing with the problems of the region. In his positions as the Chairman or Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden visited many of the countries in Eurasia. Days after a ceasefire was reached halting the fighting during the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Biden joined other world leaders in visiting Tbilisi to show his support for Georgia in the face of the Russia's attack and attempt to oust President Mikheil Saakashvili and his government. It was on this visit that Biden promised to support a \$1 billion dollar assistance package to help stabilize and rebuild Georgia's economy. He pledged to work with the Bush Administration to secure the aid package, in order to "help the people of Georgia to rebuild their country and preserve its democratic institutions."

A week after Biden visited, the late Republican Senator Richard Lugar, then the Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Tbilisi and expressed his support for the emergency aid package. Washington

moved quickly. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the package on September 3, with Biden and Lugar working with the Administration to secure quick and overwhelming bipartisan support for the assistance.

Biden's attention to the region increased when he became Vice President. In July, 2009 he visited Ukraine and Georgia at the start of the Obama-Biden Administration. He sought to reassure the leaders and people of both countries of the support of the new Obama-Biden Administration. The visit followed President Obama's early July visit to Moscow and was intended to both reiterate the United States' long-standing bipartisan support for Ukraine and Georgia, but also to tamp down speculation in the media that the new Administration was going to focus its policy in eastern Europe solely on a reset with Russia. In speeches to the Parliaments of both countries, Biden said that he and Obama had planned their visits in parallel.

In Ukraine, Biden met with the country's leaders, including President Viktor Yushchenko, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, Parliamentary Speaker Volodymyr Litvyn, Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich, and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the former speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, the Rada. Four years after the Orange Revolution and with the country in political disarray and deep economic trouble in the wake of the 2008-2009 world financial crisis, Biden gave a blunt speech to the Rada. He invoked Taras Shevchenko, the father of Ukrainian independence, saying that Shevchenko would be:

"wondering why the government wasn't exhibiting the same political maturity as the people, why communication among leaders has broken down to such an extent that political posturing appears to prevent progress, especially now, in especially difficult economic times... Ukraine, in my humble opinion, must heed the lesson of history. Effective, accountable government is the only way to provide a stable, predictable, and transparent environment that attracts investment, which is the economic engine of development."

Biden went on to Georgia from Ukraine and met with Saakashvili and other political leaders in government and opposition. His message to the Georgian people was clear:

"I come here on behalf of the United States with a simple, straightforward message: We, the United States, stand by you on your journey to a secure, free and democratic, and once again united, Georgia."

Biden called on Russia to withdraw its troops from the territories it had occupied since the end of the war. He stated emphatically that the United States would not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries. Again, Biden's message was straightforward. The United States strongly supported Georgia's independence and its NATO and EU aspirations, but good democratic governance and the observance of the rule of law was a key prerequisite of US support.

Biden did not visit Ukraine during the Presidency of Viktor Yanukovich. The Obama-Biden Administration grew increasingly critical of the corruption and human rights violations of Yanukovich and his team. The trial and imprisonment of opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko on political grounds was a critical determinant for US policymakers. When Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity resulted in Yanukovich's fleeing to Russia, Putin's seizure of Crimea and launch of a proxy war in the Donbas in February 2014, Biden pushed hard to punish Russia for its actions. According to The New York Times, Biden pressed Obama to provide lethal military equipment to Ukraine. Obama said no and sent Biden to Ukraine with a caution not to overpromise US support to the new Ukrainian leaders.

In April, 2014 Biden made the first of what would be three trips to Ukraine in that year. He sought to assess the impact of the changes in the country, asserting that the US would never recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea. He told the new Rada that they should fight to support the ideals that had brought its members to power, and he pointedly again emphasized the importance of uncorrupt, democratic governance:

"You have to fight the cancer of corruption that is endemic in your system right now. . . You need a court system that not only you and your people but the rest of the world assumes can actually adjudicate fairly disputes among people."

In June, 2014 Biden attended the inauguration of newly elected President Petro Poroshenko. According to many media reports, he repeatedly emphasized to Poroshenko how vital it was for Ukraine to fight corruption in government and business (particularly the energy industry), and to build an independent judicial system based on the rule of law. The New York Times reported that on a subsequent phone call, Biden told Poroshenko that: "You have to be whiter than snow, or the whole world will abandon you." In 2015 the United States joined with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund in a concerted effort to press Poroshenko to remove the corrupt Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin. With U.S. and EU support, the IMF linked a \$1 billion loan guarantee to the removal of the corrupt official. He was replaced.

In his farewell visit to Ukraine on January 16-17, 2017, in his last days as Vice President, Biden returned to the two pillars of U.S. policy in Ukraine: support in dealing with Russia's aggression and pressing for fundamental reform. He told the Rada:

"You're fighting both against the cancer of corruption, which continues to eat away at Ukraine's democracy within, and the unrelenting aggression of the Kremlin."

The consistency of Biden's message was clear to all.

Biden's engagement with the Black Sea and Caucasus regions is deep and personal. He knows the regions far better than any previous American President. Regional dynamics, however, have changed significantly over the past four years. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated economic problems in every country. War continues to plague both regions. The Donbas struggle undercuts Ukrainian sovereignty. Russia and the South Ossetian government continue a policy in South Ossetia of "creeping annexation" of Georgian land. No event, however, has altered the South Caucasus political landscape more than the Azerbaijani victory over Armenia in the November 2020 war in Nagorno Karabakh. Russian and Turkish troops have been directly introduced into the volatile region as peacekeepers, and new political and economic arrangements are being born.

We will only be able to see over time how the Administration deals with the new realities in the region and inside Ukraine and Georgia. There seems to be little question already that resistance to Russian domination, fighting against corruption and building democratic institutions will remain at the forefront of the Biden approach. Democracy and rule of law remain challenged in both Ukraine and Georgia.

In Ukraine the proxy war in Donbas grinds on, with a fragile ceasefire negotiated in July 2020 recently broken by deadly confrontations. Over 13,000 are estimated to have been killed. The diplomatic effort to implement the Minsk II accords

signed in February 2015 has stalled. Will the Administration attempt to work with Germany and France to jumpstart the Normandy Group negotiating process? How will Biden work with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky? The Ukraine of Zelensky still confronts not only Russian occupation of its land, but the same old problems that have bedeviled Ukraine for years: rampant corruption and actions by members of an oligarchic class who have put their own interests ahead of their country's interests. Significantly, democratic reforms remain elusive, with a prosecutorial and judicial system still deeply corrupted.

Georgia has gone through a fitful effort to build a more representative democracy. The country remains deeply polarized. In June, 2019 the ruling Georgian Dream Party of oligarch, Bidzina Ivanishvili, reached a political compromise with the opposition, of which the United National Movement of now exiled former President Mikheil Saakashvili remains the leader. The agreement had been brokered by the United States and the European Union, and had set up a more proportional and representative electoral system for the parliament. Two rounds of elections in September and October resulted in a majority of votes for the Georgian Dream. Western observers noted that there were irregularities in the results, evidence of intimidation, and use of administrative resources by the government, but they did not question the outcome.

The opposition, however, refused to accept the results and renounced the seats they had won in the Parliament. Western Ambassadors urged the opposition to take up their seats and carry on their political fight inside the Parliament. They relaunched negotiations to find a compromise. A bitter political standoff continues as this article is being written. With substantial American political and financial investment over the nearly thirty years of renewed independence, the Biden Administration must decide how it will push both sides in Georgia to find the substantial political compromise necessary to build a democratic system – a democratic system in which elections are conducted fairly and without intimidation, in which political parties are mostly interest-based and not personality-based, and where parties take turns ruling the country, and resolving differences by negotiation in the Parliament and not by endless political confrontation. As The Washington Post has editorialized, Georgian “political parties must embrace compromise, tolerance, and power-sharing.”

American support for Ukraine and Georgia rests on a broad, bipartisan respect for the efforts of the two countries to build an independent and democratic future and to improve economies and living standards. Neither country can afford to lose that bipartisan support. It is critical not just for the financial and military assistance the United States provides. It is essential for the political and moral support both countries need to stand up to Russian efforts to dominate them. Improvements in democratic practice in both countries will be vital if they are to become a part of a western political and security system, a goal to which the people of both countries aspire.

In his introduction to the Administration's March 2021 "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance" Biden wrote:

"I firmly believe that democracy holds the key to freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity. We must now demonstrate – with a clarity that dispels any doubt – that democracy can still deliver for our people and for people around the world."

Blinken listed renewal of democracy worldwide as the third of eight American foreign policy priorities, right after defeating covid-19 and turning around the economic crisis. The Biden Administration will continue to support both Georgia and Ukraine, but they must move forward in building democratic institutions and a governing system truly ruled by law.

The 2021 Freedom House Report lists both Georgian and Ukraine as only "Partly Free." Americans understand from their own history that democracy is fragile, and that building democratic institutions is a process, ever continuing to evolve. The Preamble of our own Constitution explicitly states that the nation's goal is to "form a more perfect union," implying that democracy requires continuing effort. Biden and Blinken know this. They and the US Congress will expect the leaders of both Ukraine and Georgia to move forward and not regress.

In a speech to the Ukrainian Rada on December 15, 2015, Biden challenged the members of the Parliament to live up to the ideals of the Revolution of Dignity. He quoted the Irish statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke, who was then a member of the British parliament representing a constituency in Bristol England. In a speech to his constituents in 1774, Burke said:

“Parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest – that of the whole; where not local purpose, not local prejudice ought to guide, but the general good.”

Biden bluntly told the members of the Rada that this was a standard by which each of them would be judged. This would be the standard by which:

“your grandchildren and great-grandchildren, your progeny will judge whether or not you had the moral courage to put the general good above local prejudice. And this is all within your power. It’s within your hands. Nobody else’s – yours.

“You can bend the arc of history of this nation toward greater justice and opportunity for the Ukrainian people, and you can do it now.”

Over five years later these words still apply to both Ukraine and Georgia. They represent the essence of what Biden has been telling Americans about democracy and justice in our own country. It will be what he expects from Georgia and Ukraine.

**AMBASSADOR IAN KELLY,
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY**



**GEORGIA'S NATO
ASPIRATIONS
AND THE BIDEN
ADMINISTRATION**

Ian C. Kelly is Ambassador in Residence at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He served as U.S. Ambassador to Georgia (2015-2018) and to the OSCE (2010 to 2013). Prior to serving as ambassador, Mr. Kelly served in a variety of senior roles at the U.S. Department of State, including as the department's spokesperson.

In his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Antony Blinken stated unequivocally that Georgia would be safer as a part of the NATO alliance, noting that “we have seen in the past that countries that are members of NATO have not been such a target for Russian aggression.” Clearly referring to the more secure posture of the Baltic states, which also border Russia, he added “there is ample evidence that Russia is aggressive against countries that are not in NATO and are not under [its security] umbrella.”

Such a forthright argument for Georgia’s membership was music to the ears of those of us who have long believed that not only was Georgia’s accession the right thing to do, but that it would make the country and the region more secure. To be sure, under both Obama and Trump, U.S. policy had always been, as Blinken stated, to support an open door for Georgia “if the country meets the membership criteria and contributes to our common security.”

But since 2008, Washington has prevaricated on the issue of enlarging the alliance to include Georgia. Neither the Obama nor the Trump administration made the argument that Georgia would actually be safer under NATO or provided the necessary diplomatic push for membership. The U.S. position was close to that of many European allies, who believed the possibility of antagonizing Russia precluded any enlargement to Georgia. Rather than pointing out the example of the Baltic states’ enhanced security post-NATO accession, officials on both sides of the Atlantic looked to Russia’s invasions of Georgia in 2008, and Ukraine in 2014, as evidence that enlargement would be destabilizing.¹

In contrast, the Biden administration has signaled that it would no longer prioritize relations with the Kremlin over those of its allies and partners. In his speech “On America’s Place in the World²,” Biden said “the days of the United States rolling over in the face of Russia’s aggressive actions ... are over. We will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia and defend our vital interests.”

By all indications, the Biden administration is positioning itself to be the most forward-leaning on the issue of NATO enlargement since the Bush 43 administration. This is good news for the overwhelming number of Georgians who support closer relations with and membership in NATO.

But it does not mean Georgia’s work is done. Far from it. NATO membership will

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

occur only if all members concur. Georgia has much to do to convince skeptical allies that Europe will be more secure, not less, with Georgia in NATO. Georgia must reassure those allies that granting membership to a country with 20 percent of its territory occupied by Russia does not automatically lead to war. And just as important, in light of an ongoing political crisis in the country, Georgia still has much to do to prove it is ready to meet the alliance's standards for stable and democratic governance.

On the military side, Georgia long ago proved it can be a net contributor to alliance security. Cooperation between NATO's Maritime Command and Georgia's Coast Guard has increased Black Sea security. Georgia has also supported Operation Active Endeavor, NATO's counterterrorism surveillance operation in the Mediterranean, and provides troops to the NATO Response Force.

Most significantly, it has also participated in important, and dangerous, military operations outside the alliance's territory. It is the largest non-NATO contributor to the Resolute Support, NATO's mission in Afghanistan to train, advise, and assist Afghan security and defense forces.³ It also provided combat troops to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Georgia has paid a high price for its partnership with the U.S. and NATO. In Afghanistan alone, Georgian forces suffered 32 dead and around 280 wounded.⁴

Georgia has worked hard to fulfill the alliance's military criteria for membership. As NATO requires, Georgia's defense budgeting is transparent, and its military is firmly under civilian control. Georgia contributes the requisite 2 percent of its GDP to defense. It has worked hard with NATO to ensure it meets alliance standards for strategic planning and defense reforms. Thanks to its cooperation in NATO operations, it has achieved interoperability for deployment with NATO militaries. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg put it in 2016, Georgia already "has all the practical tools to become a member of NATO."⁵

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to gaining consensus for Georgia's NATO membership is the threat of further Russian aggression. Right now, Russia has learned that all it has to do to block the NATO aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine

3 https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_11/20171201_171201_Media_Backgrounder_Georgia_en.pdf

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_of_Georgia_in_the_War_in_Afghanistan_\(2001%E2%80%932014\)#:~:text=Overall%2C%2032%20Georgian%20soldiers%20have,killing%20%20and%20injuring%209.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_of_Georgia_in_the_War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%932014)#:~:text=Overall%2C%2032%20Georgian%20soldiers%20have,killing%20%20and%20injuring%209.)

5 <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/5297/Stoltenberg%3A-Georgia-Has-All-Practical-Tools-to-Become-NATO-Member>

is to invade and occupy those countries' sovereign territory. The presence of Russian troops within the internationally recognized borders has led to fears that the occupation would trigger Article Five of NATO, and the alliance would be at war with Russia the instant Georgia and Ukraine become members. This kind of veto by an outside power is remarkably debilitating to the alliance's credibility, particularly to its open-door policy. It is in the interests of both members and aspirants that a way be found to overcome this virtual veto.

In Georgia's case, one way has been suggested by Luke Coffey of the Heritage Foundation. He argues that

"Georgia can be invited to join NATO by amending Article 6 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty (which defines which territories fall under the Article 5 protection) to temporarily exclude the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region [or South Ossetia] and Abkhazia from Article 5 protection. This amendment can be made with Georgia's accession protocol, as it was in 1951 when Turkey and Greece joined the Alliance. It is important to point out that this would only be a temporary measure until Georgia's full, internationally recognized territory is re-established by peaceful and diplomatic means at a future date. ... This would allow Georgia to join NATO more quickly and would deny Moscow's de facto veto on countries under partial Russian occupation that want to join the Alliance."⁶

As Coffey recognizes, a deal to enter NATO without South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be politically difficult for the Georgian government. The idea of ceding Georgian territorial integrity, even if temporary, would be emotionally charged, and such a move would have to be supported by all pro-Western parties. But it would be a necessary move, in terms of both overcoming the reluctance of allies to accept Georgia in the face of Russian resistance and signaling that the Georgian body politic is willing to make the politically difficult decisions to join the alliance. Georgia's brash form of politics has long been polarized, but leaders of both the ruling and the opposition parties, virtually all pro-Western, have come together before to support their common goal of Georgia joining the Euro-Atlantic community.

Regrettably, just as a new, more trans-Atlanticist administration took office in Washington, a full-blown political crisis was underway in Tbilisi, making bipartisanship all but impossible. Evidence of fraud in the Fall 2020 parliamentary

⁶ <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/nato-membership-georgia-us-and-european-interest>

elections caused an uproar among all parties who had crossed the threshold to enter parliament. They declared that until the ruling party met their demands, including an early election, they would refuse to take up their seats in the new parliament. With the exception of a handful of deputies who broke with the opposition's boycott and took up their seats, parliament is represented by only one party, Georgia Dream. At the time of this writing, there is no clear path to resolving the impasse (the last talks between the sides took place in December 2020).

Georgia may have aspirations to join the Euro-Atlantic community, but one-party rule is not compatible with NATO membership. As senior NATO official James Appathurai said, "the essence of how the governments in NATO countries operate" includes the idea of a "sitting and active opposition."⁷

The tendency toward one-party rule has long been an unfortunate feature of Georgian politics, from the era of Shevardnadze, through Saakashvili, to the present day. The government led by the Georgian Dream party has been in power since 2012, when it defeated Saakashvili's United National Movement. That government started out well. It began as a coalition, consisting of Georgian Dream and five other parties, most prominently two liberal democratic, pro-Western parties, the Free Democrats and the Republican Party.

Since then, there has been a steady move from consensus-driven coalition government to one-party rule. Before the fall 2016 election, the two key coalition parties, the Free Democrats and the Republicans, were not asked to run again with Georgian Dream. It was clear GD saw a chance for additional seats, and a veto-proof majority, in the 2016 elections — which they obtained, given that the GD's erstwhile coalition partners did not reach the 5 percent minimum threshold of votes to remain in parliament.

There is concern as well that the government is also trying to control judicial outcomes. A number of international and local observers have accused the government of not moving forward with serious judicial reforms. The State Department's 2019 Human Rights Report noted that sixteen NGOs accused the government of failing to demonstrate sufficient political will to strengthen judicial independence. These NGOs claimed that "since 2015 diligent efforts have been made to ensure strengthening and extending the influence of the so-called

⁷ <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/23311/James-Appathurai%3A-NATO-Countries-Do-Not-Have-Gov>

dominant group of corrupt and compromised judges” in the Georgian judiciary.⁸ This lack of trust in the independence of the courts prevented a credible adjudication of the opposition’s claims of election fraud: the opposition claims the courts dismissed as much as 99 percent of the total requests for recounts.⁹

If Euro-Atlantic integration is indeed a priority for both the ruling party and the main opposition parties, they must resolve the parliamentary impasse as rapidly as possible. Neither the EU nor NATO will take seriously requests for membership or closer cooperation from a country ruled by virtually one party. The lack of opposition representation means some 40 percent of Georgian voters are essentially disenfranchised. Not only is such a situation incompatible with Western standards, it is also a recipe for eventual instability — particularly in light of the challenges Georgia faces from a Russia already bent on destabilizing the country.

It is incumbent on both sides to take immediate action. A good step would be an agreement to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric, such as calls for revolution or acts of disobedience. Another would be a declaration that the present status quo is not acceptable and that both sides commit to good faith efforts until the impasse is resolved.

It is up to Georgia’s elected representatives to come up with a solution that enables a representative legislature. The removal of this obstacle to closer links with the West is in their hands. With its strategic location on the Black Sea, and its long track record of security cooperation with NATO, Georgia’s prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration should be bright.

But neither side should expect Washington to solve this crisis for them. Given the scope of domestic and international challenges facing the Biden administration, it will be a long time before it will be able to focus on issues beyond those immediate crises facing the U.S.

Still, the new administration has begun conducting a comprehensive foreign policy review, including a global examination of the U.S. military’s force posture. Let’s hope that when it reaches a review of the U.S. relationship with Georgia, it sees a stable partner that has recommitted, as President Biden has, to the renewal of pluralistic and accountable government.

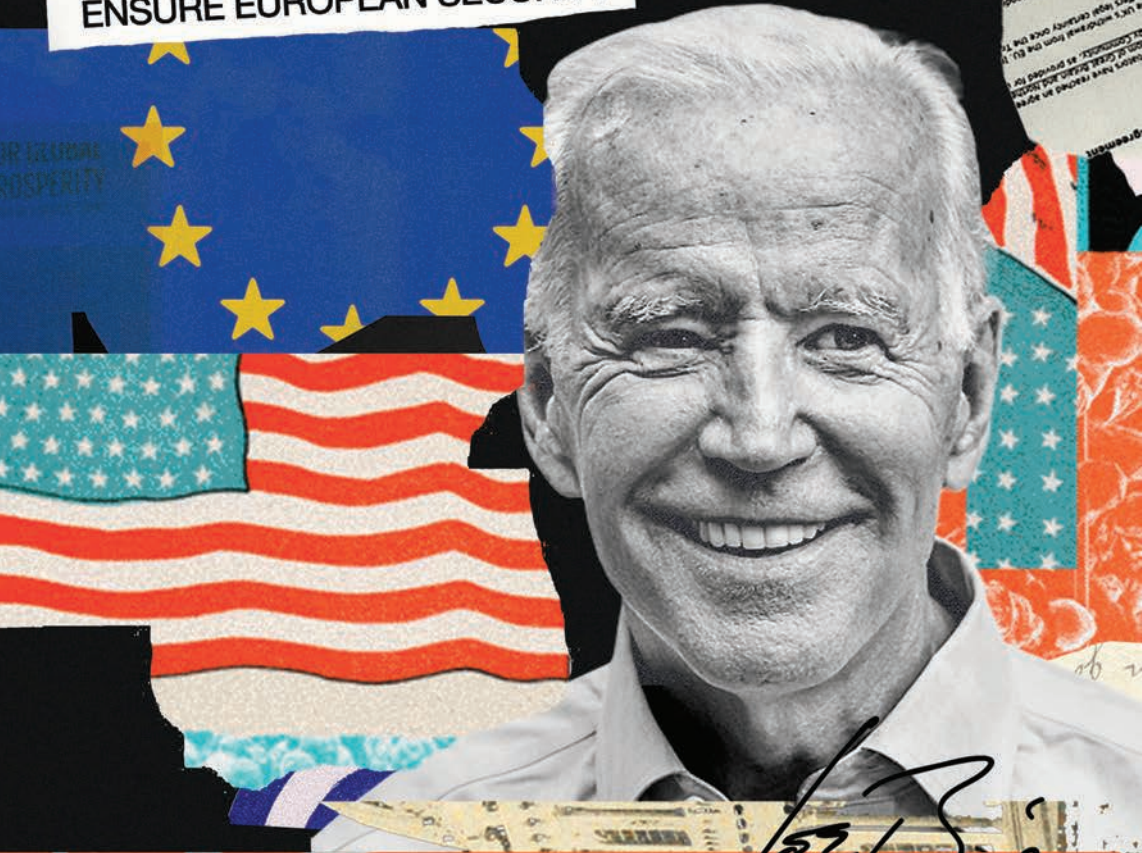
8 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>

9 <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/182223-kapanadze-sasamartloebma-99-shemtxvevashi-ar-daakmakofila-motxovna-ubnebis-gadatvlaze>

A CALL IN THE WILDERNESS 11 YEARS LATER.

A LETTER THAT WILL HELP THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

ENSURE EUROPEAN SECURITY



IRINA ARABIDZE

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“Our nations are deeply indebted to the United States. Many of us know firsthand how important your support for our freedom and independence was during the dark Cold War years. U.S. engagement and support was essential for the success of our democratic transitions after the Iron Curtain fell twenty years ago. Without Washington’s vision and leadership, it is doubtful that we would be in NATO and even the EU today,” - reads an open letter published to the Obama administration in 2009. The letter written by former political leaders and intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe includes Valdas Adamkus, Vaclav Havel, and Lech Walesa among the signatories.

The authors of the letter discuss problems in transatlantic relations and America’s role in the region. In order to maintain Europe whole, free and at peace they come forward with concrete policy proposals. Supporting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), avoiding dangerous concessions towards Russia, ensuring Europe’s energy security, and maintaining close links between the US and Central and Eastern Europe are among the suggested steps to take.

When the open letter was published Joe Biden was serving as the Vice President of the United States. He recently assumed the post of President. Looking back, it is important to assess the developments of the past decade and consider whether the letter still holds useful advice for charting a new US policy course in the region.

THE OPEN LETTER AFTER 11 YEARS

11 years ago, the authors of the open letter stressed that America and Europe needed each other. They asked President Obama to elevate relations with the European Union to a higher strategic level. However, 11 years later, the gap in political, security and economic matters has only widened in transatlantic relations.

The Biden administration came to office with a promise to repair relations with Europe. Still, commentators are already discussing those fundamental differences in security interests between Washington and European capitals that will hinder

cooperation. The leading European nations are not prepared to openly confront Russia and China, while America's primary national security challenge now revolves around this competition.

The most prominent recent example of the weakening of the united transatlantic front is Europe's new investment deal with China. It increases Europe's dependence on China, and it is particularly striking considering the fact that the EU and the US still have not concluded a similar agreement. The talks entered a deadlock during the Obama presidency after the sides failed to agree on the terms. A united front is absent in a confrontation over the 5G network as well. While the United Kingdom and Sweden banned the technology, Germany and France are holding back from similar moves.

THE RUSSIA FACTOR

11 years ago, the authors of the open letter expressed concern over NATO's inaction during Russia's invasion of Georgia. They stressed that a narrow definition of Western interests could lead to wrong concessions towards Russia. Shortly after, in September 2009, President Obama canceled the plans to station missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia, which was vehemently opposed to the plan, made no reciprocal concessions.

5 years later, the former Foreign and Defence Minister of the Czech Republic Alexandr Vondra remembered that the published open letter stirred hysteria in Washington and Brussels. The signatories were called "confrontational neo-cons" who suffered from "Russia-threat obsession" by the Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. Looking back, Vondra assured that he would not change a word in the published letter.

Russia's actions in its neighborhood became even more aggressive since 2009. Instead of withdrawing troops from Georgia's occupied regions, Russia deployed over 8000 troops and military equipment in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, and effectively annexed these territories.

Four years later Russia invaded Ukraine. For the first time since the end of World

War II, one country forcefully altered the borders of another in Europe. Russian actions go unpunished up to this day.

At the end of February, The European Union sanctioned Russia over the poisoning and jailing of the opposition leader Alexey Navalny. Sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine also remain in place. However, beyond these moves, Europe has no consolidated strategy towards Russia. There is no unified transatlantic policy for deterring Russia either.

A recent unsuccessful visit of the EU High Representative Josep Borrell to Moscow shows that the EU indeed lacks a coherent strategy. Despite Navalny's jailing, Borrell agreed to go to Russia and gave the opportunity to Moscow to openly humiliate the EU's top official.

RELATIONS WITH NATO

During the Cold War, NATO was a cornerstone of European security. After the Soviet Union collapsed, NATO members choose to preserve and expand it. However, the European nations stopped making major investments in security. The US also withdrew a large part of its troops from the Continent.

The authors of the open letter to President Obama wrote that it was a mistake to put aside the task of drawing up defense plans of the new NATO member-states. They argued NATO had to be capable of defending all of its members in case of a crisis. According to a 2017 report by the Rand Corporation, Russia can reach the capitals of the three Baltic states in 60 hours. Despite this observation, NATO defense spending has not increased in proportion to the threat.

The topic of defense spending has remained a thorny issue in transatlantic relations for years. President Obama, upset with European defense budgets, used the term "free riders" in one of his last interviews as President. President Trump was much more critical.

In 2014, only three members of NATO – the US, the UK, and Greece – were spending 2% of their GDPs on defense. Despite the pledge to reach this mark, only 10 members spend as much currently. Similar to previous Presidents, it is likely that Biden will also raise this issue with the European allies.

Meanwhile, French President Emanuel Macron is actively lobbying the idea of European strategic autonomy and has adopted a conciliatory tone towards Russia. In one of the interviews, Macron labeled NATO “braindead.” As expected, the remark was well received in Moscow. European strategic autonomy serves to distance America from Europe. Weakening America’s influence only strengthens China and Russia, since Europe has neither military potential nor will to compete with these states independently.

Recently, the German Chancellor openly declared that Europe must remain unaligned in the US-China confrontation. For the Biden administration, which expected cooperation in the spirit of democratic solidarity, this is a big disappointment.

“Great-power competitions have the feel of one-on-one duels: Athens vs. Sparta, Rome vs. Carthage, Moscow vs. Washington. Yet they are also struggles for the loyalties of those caught between the contenders, which means that the choices of lesser states can determine the fate of superpowers,” - writes Hal Brands as he describes the role of allies in US-China interaction. The confrontation over the 5G technology shows that the US will find it difficult to compete with China without European support.

ENERGY SECURITY

In the open letter, the signatories put a big emphasis on energy security. “Absent American support, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline would never have been built. Energy security must become an integral part of U.S.-European strategic cooperation,” – they write. To help promote energy security the authors ask for American support in diversifying Europe’s supply.

11 years later Germany has all but completed the Nordstream 2 pipeline, an immensely beneficial project for Russia geopolitically. Out of 1200 kilometers, only 75 remain to be laid. The construction temporarily came to a halt following the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration. Based on recent media reports, the works resumed in February. Thus far, Washington has not put pressure to implement the sanctions, wanting to warm relations with Berlin instead.

THE DECLINE OF AMERICA'S ROLE AND INFLUENCE

Compared to 11 years ago, America's influence and the forces that support the West in our region have shrunk.

In 2009, the authors of the open letter expressed concern that the ruling elites were changing. They feared that different from former leaders of Central and Eastern Europe, the new generation might not unequivocally side with the US. They highlighted that these elites have no personal experience of the revolutions of 1989 or the role America played in their democratic transformation. Absent close direct links with the US, a staunch pro-Western stance would be harder to maintain, they argued.

Since then, we witnessed alarming signs of democratic backsliding in our region. The developments unfolding in Georgia currently is one such example. During the 30 years of Georgia's independence, Western influence has fluctuated in the country. This ascendancy and decline have largely revolved around the perception of American power.

To use Charles Krauthammer's words, in the 1990s America experienced "the unipolar moment." After the Soviet Union collapsed, America became the only superpower in the World. The US possessed immense capabilities and influence. During this period, the countries of our region, despite their diverse concerns, saw America as a steadfast guarantor of their security.

This perception has now changed. The media and academia are actively discussing America's relative decline and the process of American retreat from its global obligations. Different from the Cold War, the desire to protect the US-made global World order has diminished among the American political elite and the population.

The weakening of America's role in our region is evidenced by the events in Nagorno Karabakh last year. The peace agreement was concluded in the absence of two Western negotiators, the United States and France. As a result, the international Minsk format all but disappeared. The dispute was solved by an agreement between local powers and an authoritarian model of solving conflicts gained credence.

After signing the peace deal, President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev stated that despite everyone's claims to the contrary, he turned out to be correct when claiming there was a forceful resolution to the conflict. Aliyev criticized the 30-year long diplomatic process with the participation of the West and said it yielded no results.

The situation remains volatile in Armenia as well, where only last week President Nikol Pashinian claimed the military was plotting a coup. Nationalist and pro-Russian forces oppose Pashinian who came to power as a result of a democratic wave in the country. These forces can now use the defeat in the war to discredit democratic ideas and accuse him of distancing from Russia in a vain expectation of European and American support.

BIDEN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE REGION: WHAT ACTIONS FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION?

Similar to the past, our region is experiencing numerous challenges. The Biden administration can take steps to improve America's standing in the region and halt the ongoing backsliding. These policies can be grouped around two broad concepts: **security** and **values**.

SECURITY

At the Munich Security Conference held in February President Biden once again told the world that "America is back."

"Putin seeks to weaken the European project and our NATO Alliance. He wants to undermine the transatlantic unity and our resolve, because it's so much easier for

the Kremlin to bully and threaten individual states than it is to negotiate with a strong and closely united transatlantic community. That's why standing up for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine remains a vital concern for Europe and the United States,"- Biden stated in his speech. He added: "We want a future where all nations are able to freely determine their own path without a threat of violence or coercion."

What policies should the Biden Administration put in place in our region to achieve this goal?

Russia remains the biggest opponent of Europe whole, free and at peace. If America is seriously considering investing in European security, the Biden administration has to strengthen its deterrence policy towards Russia and translate this policy into concrete actions.

In order to compete, states need military power, a demonstrated will to use force if needed, and a strong alliance system. In order to make deterrence policy work against Russia, the US will require all three of these elements. It is important that the Biden Administration:

1. Increases military presence in Europe;
2. Deepens security cooperation with non-NATO member states in the region;
3. Chooses frontline states as main partners in a competition with Russia;
4. Strengthens the cooperation formats that closely link Central and Eastern Europe.

MILITARY PRESENCE IN EUROPE

America has a valuable guidebook in a competition with Russia: The Cold War experience. Just like in the past, Russia is deterred by a show of force and is provoked by weakness.

There are about 70,000 US soldiers serving in the US European command currently. In comparison, Russia's Western Military District, which borders Europe, houses about 300,000 military servicemen. During the Cold War, several hundred

thousand US soldiers served in Europe. Over 200,000 of them were stationed in Germany, which was a frontline state.

Today, this frontline has shifted to Central and Eastern Europe. The geographic concentration of forces has to follow. This includes active US presence on the Black Sea. The US can promote an important initiative supported by Romania, which envisions stationing a permanent NATO fleet on the Black Sea. The country has long tried to focus Western attention on this topic.

SECURITY COOPERATION WITH NON-NATO COUNTRIES

It is critically important that the United States supports bilateral military cooperation with Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. While Georgia and Ukraine are not members of NATO, the US can grant the two countries a Major Non-NATO Ally status (MNNA). This will be a strong political signal. It will also provide practical support since the new status can help deepen military cooperation.

In 2014, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee put forward a bill, which envisioned granting the MNNA status to Georgia and Ukraine. The entry was later removed, but it is possible to revive the initiative. Protecting the sovereignty of Georgia and Ukraine will promote stability in the region.

Security cooperation should also envision access to defensive arms. It is noteworthy that current Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan supported supplying Georgia and Ukraine with defensive weapons during the Obama administration. This position can translate into actions under President Biden.

Stationing a permanent American or NATO military base in non-NATO countries of the region is currently unlikely, but there are alternatives. One such initiative comes from the former Commander of United States Army Europe Ben Hodges. He has previously advocated stationing rotational forces in Eastern Europe, including Ukraine and Georgia.

Georgia and Ukraine are important in the context of the Black Sea security as well. The US can help the two countries upgrade their capabilities that will contribute to the broad deterrence policy and strengthen Western positions towards Russia.

Furthermore, in order to secure Europe, it is important that the US invests in weakening Russia's influence in Belarus. A visit by the former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Belarus last year was a noteworthy step. Decreasing Belarus's political and economic dependence on Russia should become a priority for the Biden administration.

FRONTLINE STATES AND REGIONAL FORMATS

Today European countries have diverging national security priorities. For Central and Eastern European states Russia is an existential threat. Meanwhile, for some Western European nations confrontation with Russia ended with the Cold War.

The frontline states are the most loyal supporters of America's deterrence policy towards Russia. There is a natural overlap between their security interests and that of America's strategic aims. Accordingly, these states are prepared to contribute the most to the implementation of this policy.

America manages European security through NATO, while Georgia and Ukraine have yet to get to membership. In the transition period, America can create and support cooperation formats that allow unhindered access to the non-NATO states. Creating a defensive line on Russia's borders necessitates that countries of our region have the ability to participate.

The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) represents one such format. It unites 12 EU member-states between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas. The countries cooperate on trade, energy, and digital connectivity projects. The projects contribute to lessening Russian and Chinese influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

TSI enjoyed strong support from the former US administration. The US has expressed interest in investing \$1 billion in the TSI fund to support energy projects.

The Biden administration can make the plan even more ambitious by including the countries of our region in this new undertaking. The Caspian Sea can become the fourth leg of TSI, transforming it into the Four Seas Initiative.

The idea behind the Three Seas Initiative is connected with the name of Józef Piłsudski, the Polish leader of 1918-1922. Piłsudski's concept is known under the name of "Intermarium." The plan during the interwar period envisioned Poland joining forces with other Central and Eastern European states to secure the country among the ring of independent states from the Baltic to the Black Sea. This involved supporting independence movements of Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. These ideas can still contribute to America's deterrence strategy in Europe today.

VALUES

On February 23, following the detention of a leading opposition party figure in Georgia, the country received unprecedented attention from the West. Arguably, following Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the country has not been under such focus. The story was covered in dozens of articles. The US embassy in Georgia published a highly critical statement. The US State Department, the EU, and international institutions all commented on the development. Georgia was also harshly criticized by former and current diplomats and political leaders, who are concerned about the future of the country.

Apart from the alarm sounded in public statements, there is one similarity between August 7, 2008 and February 23, 2021. Both of these developments came unexpected for the West, but possibly, they were predictable. Both events can be explained by a well-known concept in international affairs known as deterrence failure.

The policy of deterrence rests on simple logic. The opponent has to clearly understand that the cost of hostile action outweighs the benefit. When your adversary is stronger you refrain from direct engagement. Instead, you test the other side with minor incidents and observe the reaction.

The more transgressions you get away with the freer you are to act. As a result, you start to violate the red lines set by the opposite side. Military power alone is not sufficient for the deterrence policy to work. The adversary has to be confident that you are willing to act. Due to the power imbalance, America's competitors are unable to engage in a direct confrontation, but they are testing the US will in every corner of the world.

Looking at the Russian actions in the lead-up to the August 2008 war with Georgia, we see numerous small test cases. Among them several striking violations. In 2007 Russia withdrew from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. A year earlier Russia orchestrated a subversive act on Georgia's North-South gas pipeline. One year later, the country violated Georgia's airspace and fired a missile deep into Georgia. In 2008 Russia restored a railway in Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia and held military drills in the North Caucasus. Georgia was openly identified as a target.

Amidst these developments, Georgia failed to receive unequivocal Western support and the Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit. The absence of punishment for smaller violations signaled to Vladimir Putin that he could get away with larger ones. Thus far, his calculation has proven to be largely correct.

A similar rationale rings true when it comes to US support for democracy and human rights inside Georgia. Turning a blind eye to smaller violations and signs of backsliding leads to bigger breaches. The events unfolding in Georgia currently are worrisome for the United States not only because it affects the future of a strategic partner. It is also noteworthy because other countries are watching. They are assessing how committed the Biden administration is to protect democratic principles and human rights in their respective regions. If Georgia, a country fully dependent on Western support can backslide, this sends a clear signal that others too can disregard American calls with impunity.

In our region, maintaining liberal-democratic governance is so closely linked with national security that it represents opposite sides of the same coin. Corruption and nepotism mean a return to the Russian orbit while building a Western-style democracy translates into maintaining freedom and mounting a barrier to Russian influence.

Growing Chinese influence in the region is another matter of concern. China uses economic opportunities and investment projects as leverage. Georgia and China

have signed a free trade agreement and the country is Georgia's third-largest trading partner. China is interested in Georgia's ports, East-West highway, and the railway system as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

The rise of Chinese influence is a problem. Different from the Western model, the Chinese economic approach rests on striking deals with the ruling elite to gain access and resources. While small groups benefit, the broader wellbeing of the population remains unchanged. In these dealings, China sees no need for the existence of sustainable state institutions.

Contrary to this approach, the Western model includes the development of institutions that ensure respect for private property, rule of law, and basic human rights. This allows the general public to improve well-being afforded by equal opportunity and protected economic activity. Chinese model envisions none of these benefits and is harmful to the country's development.

Both China and Russia find it easier to operate in countries where state institutions are weak and the authorities are unable to meet the basic needs of their citizens. Russia has very little to offer to countries like Georgia and lacks in its power to attract. As a result, it works to drive a wedge between its neighbors and the West.

Conversely, America has rich soft power instruments to deploy. Economic support, development assistance, educational and professional exchanges are a limited list of tools that the US has employed in its effort to transform Georgia. The country has already invested \$4 billion in this effort. It is important that this support is maintained.

In response to the events unfolding in Georgia, America's former ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul wrote: "Navalny arrest was first test. Myanmar second. Georgia is now third. In words, Biden has pledged to do more to advance democracy and human rights. Now it's time to match those words with deeds. Biden knows Georgia. I traveled there with him in 2009. He can have an impact there."

McFaul accurately conveyed the importance of the moment. The ball now is in the Biden administration's court.

"AMERICA IS BACK" WAS THE MAIN MESSAGE OF PRESIDENT BIDEN'S SPEECH AT THE MUNICH VIRTUAL SECURITY CONFERENCE IN FEBRUARY 2021. SINCE THEN, IT HAS BEEN THE COMMON THEME OF VARIOUS REMARKS BY BIDEN ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS AND ANALYSTS DISCUSSING POTENTIAL NEW DIRECTIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY. IT IS CLEAR NOW THAT THE NEW TEAM IS EAGER TO SIGNAL TO THE WORLD THAT AMERICA'S FRIENDS WILL BE TREATED ACCORDINGLY AND THAT AMERICA'S ADVERSARIES WOULD BE WISE TO BE ON GUARD.

OF COURSE, TWO MONTHS INTO THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S TENURE, IT IS TOO EARLY TO DRAW ANY CONCLUSIONS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE SINCE VERY FEW OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND IN THE OTHER BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT. WITH MANY KEY POSITIONS STILL TO BE FILLED, IT MAY BE TOO EARLY TO PREDICT THE EXACT DIRECTIONS THAT THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICY WILL TAKE.

IN THIS SECOND VOLUME OF THE JOURNAL OF THE FRONTLINE DEMOCRACY, FOREIGN POLICY PROFESSIONALS AND SCHOLARS ANALYZE THE FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES THAT THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION WILL POTENTIALLY FACE AND OFFER FORECASTS ON HOW U.S. POLICY MIGHT APPLY TO EASTERN EUROPE AND THE BLACK SEA REGION IN PARTICULAR.

