[Will Bunch](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/will-bunch)

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**Policies on vaccine sharing**

The response from the Biden administration to India’s desperate pleas – not to mention global demands for patent waivers that could speed the flow of vaccines to less-developed nations – has been shockingly underwhelming. Things can – and should – change rapidly, but so far the tone-deaf US response more closely echoes the heartless rejection of Nazi-era Jewish refugees on the MS St Louis than the times America found its better angels and raced humanitarian aid to earthquake-ravaged Haiti or even an adversary in Iran.

“We have a special responsibility to the American people,”State Department spokesman Ned Price said Thursday when pressed on whether the US would lift a ban on importing raw materials for vaccines to India. “It’s, of course, not only in our interest to see Americans vaccinated, it’s in the interests of the rest of the world to see Americans vaccinated.”

No one can deny there has been an urgent need to inoculate America – an epicenter of the world pandemic for more than a year – but at this moment where vaccine hesitancy in Trump-y red states and counties is becoming a bigger US problem than vaccine supply, Team Biden has been painfully slow to switch to a globalist, humanitarian mode. In Price’s words, it's hard not to hear a phrase that has dragged down our nation since Donald Trump’s 2016 victory.

America First.

Take a step back and – with the 46th president about to mark his milestone 100th day in office – we can see a troubling pattern that’s starting to become a bad look for a presidency that's been quite successful in so many other areas.

In 2020, Joe Biden the candidate promised an anxious electorate that America could again become a moral leader in the world community, even on the difficult questions posed by the fierce urgency of the coronavirus. Last July, when the progressive activist Ady Barkan interviewed Biden and asked him specifically about sharing US breakthrough vaccine technology with the world, the then-Democratic nominee answered, “[Y]es, yes, yes, yes, yes. And it’s not only a good thing to do, it's overwhelmingly in our interest to do.”But more than three months into Biden’s presidency, with India and other countries seeking that patent waiver, the answer so far has been no, no, no, no, no.

If this broken promise sounds depressingly familiar, it should. When 2020 presidential candidate Biden was promising suburban swing voters that he’d restore America’s tarnished image as a beacon of hope for immigrants, he specifically promised a dramatic hike in the annual cap on admitting refugees through political asylum, which Trump had shrunk to an unthinkable low. Since Jan. 20, however, the Biden administration stalled, then said they'd keep the cap at Trump’s abysmal level of just 15,000, then backed off after a progressive outcry – all with the end result that 2021 probably won’t offer much relief to huddled masses seeking American freedom.

The Biden pattern is becoming clear. When a policy clearly and directly aids the American middle class – relief checks, child tax credits, building roads and fixing bridges – Team Biden is all in, willing to leverage his thinnest of Democratic majorities in Congress to get the large-scale programs they feel the nation needs. But policies aimed at restoring America’s global citizenship – admitting refugees, or foreign aid to end a global pandemic – that are easy to bash with Fox News chyrons or by the GOP loons who wanted to form an ‘America First’ caucus seem to have Biden and his top advisers terrified of the ‘optics.’ Playing that angle – let’s not watch a Fox-fired flap over vaccine aid, or the border, kill our chance at an infrastructure bill – is a political strategy. But it's not a moral one, and a Biden brand of ‘America First Lite’ will undermine him in the long run.

Seeing people dying in the streets of India should be the wake-up call. And in the present crisis, there are ways to quickly help a South Asian ally that make sense and won’t seriously hamper our push to crush COVID-19 in the United States. Specifically:

Vaccine doses. Currently the United States is sitting on a large stockpile – at least 20 million to 30 million doses, maybe more – of the AstraZeneca vaccine that’s been approved for use in India and 70 other nations, even though its maker hasn't even applied for emergency U.S. approval as the nation aims for full vaccination by the summer. So far, the Biden administration has resisted calls to transfer these doses, or others, even as America moves toward oversupply.

Raw material. India is actually the world’s largest overall manufacturer of vaccines, but production of COVID-19 shots has lagged for a lack of raw materials. Again, the United States has a surplus, and, again, the Biden administration has failed to take action to change that status quo under the Defense Production Act that requires our domestic firms get these materials first. “By stockpiling vaccines & blocking the export of crucial raw materials needed for vaccine production, the United States is undermining the strategic Indo-US partnership,” Milind Deora, a politician from Mumbai, tweeted last week.

Patent waivers. More broadly, vaccine production and shots administered could ramp up worldwide if the Biden administration – and our allies in Europe and elsewhere, who tend to follow our lead – agree to a waiver from the World Trade Organization, or WTO, to free the intellectual property rights to the vaccines. So far, the US default position of protecting the interests of our wildly profitable Big Pharma giants has trumped our moral duty to the world.

It’s bad enough that Biden isn’t living up to his campaign promises. But the failures on global coronavirus policy – if they persist – will have real-world consequences. In the short run, watching COVID-19 spiral out of control in India or – heaven forbid – elsewhere will also hurt Americans in material ways, dragging down the world’s economy and maintaining travel restrictions, etc. The long-term implications could be worse. Ironically, the State Department’s Price’s cold rejection of sharing vaccine ingredients came on the same day Biden was holding a summit seeking global cooperation on reducing carbon pollution, a life or death matter for Planet Earth. But why should other nations listen when Biden plays deaf on COVID-19 aid?

More depressingly, this debacle shows that kicking Trump out of the White House hasn’t fully lifted America out of the brain fog that he and his 74 million or so supporters have brought down on our nation. Trump’s shock victory in 2016 around ‘Build the wall!’ xenophobia clearly has made Team Biden gun-shy about taking down the psychological walls that we’ve erected the last five years. But boasts that ‘America is back!’ will sound empty until they find that courage.

The good news is that it doesn’t have to stay this way. On refugees, the Biden administration was quick to at least announce a change in direction when progressives and other everyday folks spoke out and said maintaining Trump’s policies was unconscionable. Now it's time to do the same on the crisis in India and other nations.

Excerpted: ‘Biden’s ‘America First Lite’ Policies on Vaccine Sharing and Refugees Are a Terrible Look for the US’

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