**President Biden presents an altered foreign policy**

**[Dr Farooq Hasnat](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/dr-farooq-hasnat)**

March 13, 2021

President Biden, while addressing the State Department, on February 4 presented a sketch of his foreign policy, which was promised to be different from that of former President Trump, in style and content. He laid the foundations of his future plans by highlighting, “..we must start with diplomacy rooted in America’s most cherished democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity”. This is exactly the opposite of what Trump believed.

The President repeatedly stressed that his objective will be to take along the world, especially the allies when dealing with various important issues and conflicts. He further said that diplomacy would be the cornerstone of his foreign policy and not brinkmanship. He said that even with the opponents, his administration would utilise diplomatic measures to resolve differences and conflicts. He further promised to adopt a more humane policy towards distressed refugees. Earlier, within hours of taking charge, through a series of executive orders, he announced the rejoining of the Paris Climate Accord and World Health Organisation (WHO)—the two international organisations, from which Trump had pulled out citing flimsy reasons. And above all, he rescinded the notorious “Muslim ban” imposed by Trump, equating terrorism with Muslims.

[Bolivian court issues arrest warrant for Jeanine Anez](https://nation.com.pk/13-Mar-2021/bolivian-court-issues-arrest-warrant-for-jeanine-anez)

As far as regional conflicts are concerned, he particularly mentioned the ongoing conflict in Yemen, which has inflicted untold misery on the civilian population, especially the children. He at that occasion announced to appoint a special representative in Yemen. President Biden announced that the US would not be a party in the ongoing conflict and rather facilitate peace along with the United Nations. He recognised that in the Yemen war, more than 100,000 Yemenis have been killed and millions displaced. He further said that “this war has to end”. In this context, he announced the end of American support for the warring parties and a ban on arms sales to the aggressors. The highlight of the Biden policy towards the Gulf region is reflected in the ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE. Previously the Senate had imposed arms sanctions on these two countries, citing gross human rights violations, where American arms killed civilians but was vetoed by President Trump. Though the Biden arms ban is temporary in nature, it reflects the policy aims and intentions of the new administration.

[Houthis reject US-proposed cease-fire plan in Yemen](https://nation.com.pk/13-Mar-2021/houthis-reject-us-proposed-cease-fire-plan-in-yemen)

Although in his speech President Biden did not mention the Iran Nuclear Deal, but later on, based on the principles of Biden’s foreign policy, as reflected in the speech, there are indications that the US is interested in pushing forward some kind of negotiations with Iran. Whatever pre-condition this administration presents to rejoin the nuclear agreement, it is a departure from the Trump policy of enforcing inhumane economic sanctions on the Iranian nation, to exert “maximum pressure”—a bullying tactic. The foreign policy team of President Biden has been involved in negotiations with Iran, with a conviction that it was in the interest of the United States to normalise relations, and that diplomacy was the appropriate tool. It is not likely to be different this time, as well.

On Afghanistan, it seems, up till now, no decision has been made; whether to withdraw before May 1 of this year, as agreed by the Taliban-Trump peace deal from that war-torn country or to first strengthen the pro-American government in Kabul. It was reported by a Washington-based think tank: “The Biden administration is likely to ask other countries, including China, Iran, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, to pressure the Taliban into amending the agreement”. On the other hand, the Taliban issued a statement, saying that if the Biden administration withdrew from its commitments, there would be bloodshed in Afghanistan. If we go by the policy statement of the President, and its intent, then it is likely that Washington would figure out ways and means through diplomatic channels, to resolve a 9-year-old conflict.

[Over 83,000 Somalis displaced due to water crisis: UN](https://nation.com.pk/13-Mar-2021/over-83-000-somalis-displaced-due-to-water-crisis-un)

On relations with big powers like Russia and China, he categorically said that his administration would oppose any interference in the internal affairs of his country by the Russians and would deal accordingly. In the same instance, he vouched to go ahead, extending the START Treaty (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) for another five years. On China, the Biden administration vouched to protect its interests while avoiding a conflict. At the same instance, he was, “ready to work with Beijing when it’s in America’s interest to do so”.

There is a marked shift between Biden’s view of the world when compared with Trump’s erratic policies, may it be the Middle East or its allies in Europe. Trump became a party with Israel in its entirety, thus jeopardising the traditional American role of “an honest broker”, to resolve the decades’ long dispute—moving towards a two-state formula, to attain sustainable peace on the Israeli-Palestinian front. For all practical purposes, Trump encouraged the Israelis to colonise the Palestinian territories, following the policy of apartheid, while President Biden appointed a special representative for the Palestine issue. Reflecting the views of the new administration Richard Mills, the acting American ambassador to the United Nations, in a speech supported a “mutually agreed, two-state solution” between Israel and the Palestinians, ‘in which Israel lives in peace and security, alongside a viable Palestinian state.’ “And he called on the parties to refrain from unilateral actions, such as the annexation of territory and settlement activity by Israel, or incitements to violence by the Palestinians, that could make such an outcome more difficult”.

[Bilawal Bhutto mocks Talal Chaudhry](https://nation.com.pk/13-Mar-2021/bilawal-bhutto-mocks-talal-chaudhry)

Another policy shift is the stress of multilateralism by the President, which departs from Trump’s obsession with isolating the U.S from the world. It can be hoped that better conditions would prevail on the international scene. President Biden has vast experience of world affairs. He was a member as well as headed the Senate foreign relations committee, for decades. Besides, he was Vice President for four years, participating actively in the matter of global interests. In particular, he was actively involved in the negotiating preceding the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal. This confirms a belief that President Biden prefers diplomacy to brinkmanship—once again a negation of Trump’s thought process.

Trump desired to isolate the US in world affairs, bullying, at his whims, and pursuing the ideology of white supremacists. While Biden is departing from that self-defeating thought process, he is inclined towards multilateralism and diplomacy as reflected in his key speech to the Foreign Affairs experts at the State Department.