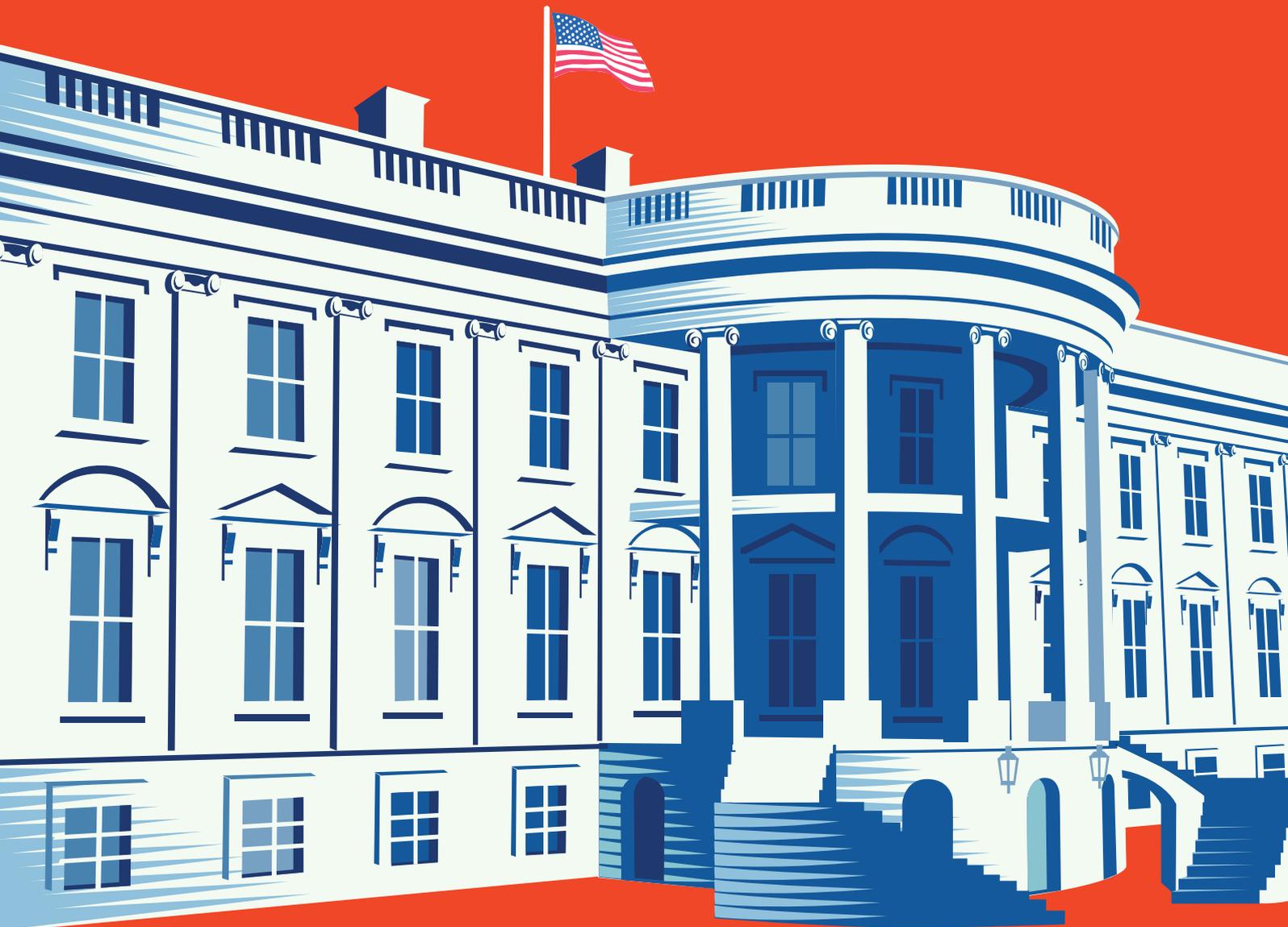




UNITED STATES  
STUDIES CENTRE

# BIDEN VS TRUMP: AN AUSTRALIAN GUIDE TO THE ISSUES

AUGUST 2020





## UNITED STATES STUDIES CENTRE

The United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney is a university-based research centre, dedicated to the rigorous analysis of American foreign policy, economics, politics and culture. The Centre is a national resource, that builds Australia's awareness of the dynamics shaping America – and critically – their implications for Australia.

The United States Studies Centre is focussing its research on two simple questions in 2020 and beyond: What is the trajectory of American politics, power and prestige? And what are the implications for Australia? This is one examination of such questions.

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SYDNEY



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# INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the United States Studies Centre is focussed on two research questions:

1. What is the trajectory of American power, politics and prestige?
2. What are the implications for Australia?

In this collection of short essays, the United States Studies Centre's scholars and experts address these questions under two scenarios – a second term for President Trump, or a Biden administration – examining a wide array of policy domains, as befits the broad expertise at the Centre.

Unsurprisingly, the future course of US foreign policy and defence figures prominently in this collection of essays. One of the most important successes of the Trump administration has been cementing the realisation that the United States and China are engaged in a struggle for primacy, with a return to “great power rivalry” now a cornerstone of US strategic thinking.

**ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SUCCESSES OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN CEMENTING THE REALISATION THAT THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA ARE ENGAGED IN A STRUGGLE FOR PRIMACY, WITH A RETURN TO “GREAT POWER RIVALRY” NOW A CORNERSTONE OF US STRATEGIC THINKING.**

Across the United States Studies Centre, there is consensus that no matter who wins the 2020 election, this contest between the United States and China will (a) continue to be the most significant driver of US foreign policy for the foreseeable future, (b) be the single most important tension in global affairs, (c) continue to grow in scope, encompassing trade and investment, research and development and elements of civil society. The implications for Australia are immense, as highlighted throughout the essays.

Ashley Townshend, Dr Charles Edel, Dr John Lee, Professor James Curran and Stephen Loosely address the likely shape of US foreign policy under either election outcomes, centred on US-China relations. Dr Stephen Kirchner masterfully surveys the likely contours – and battlegrounds – of US trade policy under either a second Trump administration or a Biden administration. Drawing on their deep understandings of Washington, Bruce Wolpe and Kim Hoggard provide excellent summaries of how Australian governments can negotiate their way with either administration. The modus operandi of a potential Biden administration is generally assessed as being more traditional and conventional than a second Trump administration, perhaps especially with respect to alliances, partnerships and use of multilateral institutions. But the change in the strategic mindset in the United States – and a recognition of the breadth of the challenge China poses to the United States – is here to stay.

Accordingly, the Centre's experts assess the likely paths of US policy – and implications for Australia – in a number of related domains, cognisant of the way that the US-China rivalry is far from simply a contest for military superiority in the Indo-Pacific. Essays by Brendan Thomas-Noone and Claire McFarland highlight that at least as important is the contest for technological primacy, securing strategically important supply chains and innovation and research and development (R&D) pathways. Zoe Meers examines increasingly fractious relations between “big tech” and the US Government, and what may lie in the regulatory or legislative pipeline – or not.

Dr Gorana Grgic and Jared Mondschein summarise the likely course of US policy with Europe and the Middle East, respectively – an important reminder for Australians that, notwithstanding the importance of US-China and the Indo-Pacific, the United States has strategic interests and alliances spanning the globe, competing for the

attention of the next administration. Dr Jim Golby (recently retired from the US Army) surveys the tensions in civil-military relations that have built up over the Trump administration – an extremely important but understudied development – and the likely pathways under a second Trump or a Biden administration.

**THIS US ELECTION – AND THE ADMINISTRATION THAT COMES FROM IT – WILL BE FIRST AND FOREMOST CONSUMED BY THE HUMAN AND ECONOMIC TOLL OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

Of course, this US election – and the administration that comes from it – will be first and foremost consumed by the human and economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. Associate Professor Adam Kamradt-Scott looks at the likely course of healthcare in the United States under either administration with a particular focus on the COVID-19 response. Dr Lesley Russell examines the politics and likely future of “Obamacare” (the Affordable Care Act). Climate change has been pushed well and truly into the political and policy background by COVID-19 and foreign policy, but Dr Brendon O’Connor reminds us that this issue is likely to resurface with political and policy urgency over the term of the next US administration, especially if Democrats sweep in November. David Uren focuses on the likely policy paths to be taken in economic recovery from COVID-19.

Elliott Brennan looks at policing and protest in the United States – an issue and phenomenon that the next administration is likely to be dealing with under any scenario, with important symbolic and political resonances around the world, Australia included. And Dr Rodney Taveira looks at the way pop culture will both reflect and buttress the likely direction of American politics and soci-

ety under either election outcome, an important and under-appreciated vector of connection and influence between Australia and the United States.

These essays are far from the last word from the United States Studies Centre on where the United States is headed after the 2020 election. Look for more from the Centre’s scholars and experts between now and the election. And once the election outcome is known, the Centre will provide a guide to the next administration and the implications for Australia.

Finally, like me, I’m sure you’ll be impressed by the substantive breadth of these essays and the topic coverage, a great testament to the quality and span of the United States Studies Centre’s scholars and experts. My thanks to all of the authors and to project co-ordinators and editors Elliott Brennan, Jared Mondschein, and Mari Koeck as well as to Susan Beale for another fantastic production job.

**Professor Simon Jackman**  
**CEO, United States Studies Centre**

11 August 2020

# US FOREIGN POLICY

BY STEPHEN LOOSLEY



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

A Biden administration foreign policy is likely to resemble a continuation of the Obama administration's, involving restoring relations with allies and returning to international agreements and instruments while taking a firm but not abusive line on China or Russia.

Joe Biden values allies and holds a similar view to the Trump administration's former defense secretary, James Mattis. According to Biden, America need not try to do things alone. Its allies can be force multipliers.

### **A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION FOREIGN POLICY IS LIKELY TO RESEMBLE A CONTINUATION OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S, INVOLVING RESTORING RELATIONS WITH ALLIES AND RETURNING TO INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND INSTRUMENTS.**

Biden was chosen by Senator Barack Obama to be his running mate in 2008, courtesy of Biden's extensive foreign policy experience in the US Senate where he chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Over his long career, Biden developed excellent relations with a broad range of international leaders. He has always emphasised the imperative of being able to talk foreign policy issues out, even with opponents.

The former VP is not without foreign policy critics. These include Robert Gates, former Secretary of Defense under both George W Bush and Barack Obama, who argued Biden was wrong on nearly every major foreign policy issue.

However, the great need for American foreign policy in the immediate future is stability and predictability.

Resultingly, Biden will simply let many decisions of the Trump administration stand, where appropriate. The best example of this is the US Embassy to Israel will likely remain in Jerusalem.

For Australia, the pressing need for statecraft is to encourage the United States to remain active in the Indo-Pacific at all levels from security challenges to human rights. The South Pacific looms large within this task.

A Biden administration should be encouraged to re-join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This is not as difficult as it might seem, for the trade rupture with China provides a strategic dimension and thereby additional impetus for Americans to embrace the TPP framework.

The Five Eyes will remain important as will cooperation in guaranteeing the integrity of cyberspace. Internationally, the probability of three internets – US/Western, Chinese, and a separate Russian initiative – will assume a more definite form.

Australia has negotiated the shoals of the Trump administration with great care. Yet regardless of the electoral outcome, the challenge remains to build on those foundations working closely with allies and partners – including Japan, New Zealand, Indonesia and India – to demonstrate the robust nature of democracies under great pressure and sustained challenge.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

In normal times, US foreign policy does not necessarily figure prominently in American presidential elections. But 2020 is very different and given the continuing tensions between the United States and China, foreign policy is likely to form part of the core of candidate debates, public discussion, media commentary and voter decision making. Certainly, President Donald Trump, with his reference to the 'China Virus', has endeavoured to shift relations with Beijing into the centre-ground of his campaign, spilling the friction with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) into the public arena on virtually everything from public health through national security, including cyberspace.

**PRESIDENT TRUMP, WITH HIS REFERENCE TO THE 'CHINA VIRUS', HAS ENDEAVOURED TO SHIFT RELATIONS WITH BEIJING INTO THE CENTRE-GROUND OF HIS CAMPAIGN.**

The outcome of the election is unlikely to change the American perspective on the CCP much in the short term, if at all. This is due simply to the fact that a political consensus has emerged in Washington. Aggressive Chinese behaviour witnessed most vividly in repression in Hong Kong, military expansion in the South China Sea and treatment of the Uighurs in Xinjiang has caused broad American opinion to shift from those times when Beijing was seen as an emerging and welcomed citizen in the global order to a crystallising view that China is a strategic adversary of the United States.

Donald Trump has not sketched out a second-term agenda, but if re-elected, his foreign policy is unlikely to change in terms of its objectives, but he is likely to grow even more adventurous.

A second Trump administration will be Trump unplugged, without the need to carry electoral opinion, respect opinion amongst US allies or even pay too much attention to Congress.

So the features of Trump foreign policy to date are likely to be underlined in a second term: 'America First', driving trade deals; reliance upon personal relations with authoritarian leaders, such as Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin; contempt for multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organization (which has been less than impressive in the current crisis) and a thinly veiled disdain for American allies. Foreign policy will remain transactional and is likely to be characterised again by recurring changes in personnel at State, or in Defense, or in the White House.

Fortunately, there exists a blueprint for how Australian policymakers can deal effectively with inspired unilateralism in Washington DC.

On three occasions, President Trump has announced American withdrawal from the Middle East. Yet on each occasion, senior administration and congressional figures have walked the policy back. There are serious Australian interests in the Middle East, reflected in our military deployments.

Australia did not complain noisily about the unpredictability in Washington DC. Its diplomats merely spoke with senior people at the departments of State and Defense, making the point they had been blindsided. Their response was instructive. "So were we," replied the Americans. This is one of the means by which Australia maintains its standing in Washington DC as a friend and dependable ally. In a second Trump administration, this standing could well prove invaluable.

# US-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION

BY CHARLES EDEL



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

The relationship between Washington and Beijing is increasingly characterised by competition in nearly every field – economic, military, technological, institutional and even ideological. That competition is unlikely to abate even without a President Trump, and will in all likelihood intensify as modifying factors, such as economic interdependence, become less significant drivers of the relationship.

Biden has made it clear that as China has become more domestically repressive and externally aggressive, his administration would not respond by turning back the clock to an earlier era of engagement, but rather by better positioning the country to respond to the comprehensive set of challenges posed by China. This would have both domestic and foreign policy components.

A Biden administration would almost certainly result in a major shift in tone and rhetoric, a recommitment to multilateral engagement, a renewed focus on Southeast Asia, and a major push to rebuild ties with traditional allies. While there would be a drive to identify limited areas of cooperation with China, some decoupling of the Chinese and American economies would continue. Human rights and democracy support would be high on the agenda, as would be increasing the budgets for diplomacy, aid, and development finance. A Biden administration would likely enact policies designed to secure technological advantage, strengthen economic resilience by building trusted supply chains, reinvigorate diplomacy, combat illiberal ideologies, enhance military deterrence and build greater asymmetric capabilities.

But for all the areas of broad consensus among Democrats, there are also areas of disagreement and ongoing debate – such as whether the United States should maintain military dominance in Asia, whether values and democracy support should have a prominent place in US foreign policy, and whether a more [accommodationist](#) approach would work with Xi Jinping's China. There is also discussion about whether the [primary competition](#) between China and the United States is mainly in the military realm or in the economic and ideological space, and subsequently which set of policies and budgetary allocation of resources should receive priority.

**BIDEN HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT AS CHINA HAS BECOME MORE DOMESTICALLY REPRESSIVE AND EXTERNALLY AGGRESSIVE, HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD NOT RESPOND BY TURNING BACK THE CLOCK TO AN EARLIER ERA OF ENGAGEMENT, BUT RATHER BY BETTER POSITIONING THE COUNTRY TO RESPOND TO THE COMPREHENSIVE SET OF CHALLENGES POSED BY CHINA.**

Finally, there is a broader debate about how to [sequence](#) competition and cooperation, and whether global health and climate change crises are so dire that competition needs to be moderated, or bypassed in these areas.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

During the first term of the Trump presidency, strategic competition has emerged as the defining characteristic of the broad US-China relationship. This is apparent well-beyond the executive branch.

Recent polling in the United States shows hardening attitudes toward China on most issues. Nearly three-quarters of Americans (73 per cent) now say they have an [unfavourable view of China](#), and more than [60 per cent](#) believe the United States should take steps to hold China accountable for its handling of the coronavirus and its unfair trade practices.

The actions by the US Congress also reflect this hardening, with legislation moving forward to sanction Chinese officials for the ongoing genocide in Xinjiang and crackdown in Hong Kong, strengthen the United States' military capabilities in Asia, and boost investment into research, development, and manufacturing of key technologies.

But as much as popular attitudes and congressional legislation matter, presidential attitudes matter more in foreign policy. If Trump is re-elected, the contradictions of American policy on China would become more pronounced. Trump's antipathy towards coalition building, his consistent affinity towards authoritarian governments and silence on their human-rights records, and his long-held opposition to free trade and multilateralism, will not moderate. Meanwhile, his administration will continue to have internal divisions between those seeking economic engagement on more advantageous terms, those bent on further disentangling the United States and Chinese economies, and those looking to thwart Beijing's actions across the board.

A second Trump term would likely result in an uptick in symbolically aggressive actions, similar to the closure of the Chinese Consulate in Houston, a push for further bifurcation of the internet and increased regulation of the tech industry, more blacklists of Chinese companies and sanctions on Chinese officials. Trump would also likely restrict Chinese students and scholars studying or visiting the United States. There would continue to be a push for reshoring manufacturing in the United States, and on the defence front, Trump would call for larger defence budgets, while cutting funding for diplomacy, foreign aid, and economic development. On the diplomatic front, a second Trump term might result in closer US-Australian ties, but that would likely prove the exception rather than the model for US alliances.

Looming over all of this would be the uncertainty of a temperamental Donald Trump. The Trump administration has presided over the largest shift in US policy towards China in four decades, but Trump himself is the greatest variable in this equation, on the one hand praising Xi Jinping, asking the Chinese leader for help with his re-election, treating Huawei and ZTE as potential concessions to the Chinese, and endorsing China's crackdowns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and on the other hand repeatedly blaming China and criticising China for a range of issues. As John Bolton, Trump's former National Security Advisor [wrote](#), "The Trump presidency is not grounded in philosophy, grand strategy or policy. It is grounded in Trump. That is something to think about for those, especially China realists, who believe they know what he will do in a second term."

# US-CHINA DECOUPLING

BY JOHN LEE



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

A Biden administration will broadly support the decoupling objectives of the existing Trump administration and persist with many of its policies, even if they are no longer accompanied by 'America First' rhetoric.

However, a Biden administration is more likely to revisit the decision to withdraw from the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and assess the desirability of joining the offshoot Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). At the minimum, Biden is more likely to revive the strategy behind the TPP which is to use the leverage resulting from the size of the US domestic market to persuade countries to abide by specific rules and standards.

A Biden administration is also more likely to put increased emphasis on labour, environmental and human rights standards as a prerequisite of doing business with the United States and in promoting a 'rules-based' economic order more generally.

This will not affect Australia directly but will make it more challenging for Canberra to support the Biden administration's regional economic diplomacy vis-à-vis most of its Southeast Asian partners.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

The emerging and most disruptive battleground between the US-China when it comes to economic decoupling will be in the enabling technology sectors neatly captured in Beijing's 'Made in China 2025' (MIC2025) blueprint. It is in these sectors that Australia will most feel the pressure to 'choose' between US or Chinese markets, capital, technologies, and collaborations.

Leadership and dominance in these technologies and sectors are generally predicated on four conditions:

1. Investment at scale
2. Access to large and advanced markets
3. An effective system to drive innovation and competition
4. Channels to develop and/or acquire technology and know-how

China's state-led approach and economic size clearly fulfil the first condition. However, meeting the other three conditions is far more problematic for China. It becomes much more challenging if China's access to markets in North America (and Europe) is becoming more restricted—as it is—or if its firms are denied access to essential inputs such as big data from those markets – as they are.

China's corporate and government sectors are over-burdened by the challenge and cost of managing the consequences of massive misallocation of capital and mounting debts despite the country's high rates of household savings. This means Chinese firms seeking to expand globally are increasingly dependent on international sources of finance, and the United States' deep and diverse capital markets most of all.

In a second term of office, President Trump will tighten rules which allow Chinese firms such as Alibaba (market cap of approximately US\$500 billion) to list on US exchanges. There are currently about 160 Chinese firms listed with a combined market value of more than US\$1 trillion. This is a significant presence. Shares on the Shanghai Stock Exchange, which is China's largest exchange, have a total market capitalisation of about US\$4 trillion.

Trump will also likely apply greater scrutiny and restraints for Chinese companies to be included in stock indices (e.g. MSCI All Country World ex-US Investable Market Index) and pension funds (e.g. Thrift Savings Plan's International Stock Fund). Being included in such indices and funds provide Chinese firms with flow-on advantages such as access to cheaper capital and 'captured' institutional investors given the need for benchmark or passive funds to own these stocks.

It is likely that Trump will interpret existing provisions to give himself even broader powers to block corporate and sales transactions between American and Chinese firms and the export of whole classes of products or certain technologies such as semiconductors and aeronautical equipment (even if these powers are held in reserve most of the time).

It is almost certain a growing number of Chinese firms in the MIC2025 sectors will be included on the 'restricted entity' list and ever-harsher penalties will be threatened and applied to those violating the restrictions: enormous fines, revocation of US licences, blocking of US dollar transactions and criminal penalties for executives.

Chinese innovation and know-how also depend heavily on joint ventures with foreign firms. This will be an increasingly unacceptable situation as it will help China emerge as the global leader in terms of enormous advances in innovation and know-how. Therefore, there will be attempts to identify and capture a larger share of the supply and value chain across a growing number of emerging and enabling technologies and sectors and deny these to China.

One would expect a second Trump administration to move much more quickly and further than a Biden one when it comes to further restrictions on visas for Chinese researchers and tertiary students to US institutions in fields such as aviation, robotics and advanced manufacturing. A Trump administration is also likely to exert pressure on other allies, such as Japan, South Korea, the European Union and Australia to do the same.

# US CHINA POLICY

BY JAMES CURRAN



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

A Biden presidency should not be necessarily interpreted through the simplistic lens of the United States having an opportunity to ‘course-correct’ in November, and nowhere is this more evident than on the likely contours of a Democrat administration’s China policy. Biden has had a long career at the heart of the US foreign policy establishment, and whilst his intellectual history on this question suggests the balance tilts towards a more moderate stance on the middle kingdom, he has been ceaselessly banging the anti-China drum during the election campaign. Trump, casting his opponent as ‘Beijing Biden’, has brought a concerted effort on the part of the Democratic nominee to showcase his ‘tough on China’ credentials: he has previously called Xi a ‘thug.’ But this is not just standard election-year posturing: party leaders on Capitol Hill, recall, have been pressuring the President since the beginning of his term to put the fiscal squeeze on China, particularly on tariffs. And Biden too will have noted the same polling showing where the US public sits on China. The fury being generated over the coronavirus might well act as an early constraint on any radical China policy shifts by the new president.

It is likely, however, that whilst Biden will endorse the concept of the United States’ ‘strategic competition’ with China, and continue with ‘[aggressive trade enforcement](#)’, his administration will look for limited cooperation with Beijing, both in multilateral forums and on challenges such as climate change – an issue on which Biden wants to hold a summit with Xi in the early days of his presidency. Biden has also talked of the need for high-level strategic dialogue with Beijing. Some

of the key players likely to form his foreign policy team have also distanced themselves from the ‘cold war’ clarion calls of the Trump administration, but they will not back off on tackling head-on China’s competitive economic advantages.

**BIDEN HAS HAD A LONG CAREER AT THE HEART OF THE US FOREIGN POLICY ESTABLISHMENT, AND WHILST HIS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY ON THIS QUESTION SUGGESTS THE BALANCE TILTS TOWARDS A MORE MODERATE STANCE ON THE MIDDLE KINGDOM, HE HAS BEEN CEASELESSLY BANGING THE ANTI-CHINA DRUM DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.**

Australia will feel no easing of the pressure to do more in the region if Biden wins the White House. Some close to him have a view of Canberra as a loyal US ally around the world, but not necessarily in Asia. Regeneration of the United States’ Asian alliances will undoubtedly prompt once more Washington’s desire for Australia to take stances and positions that may not necessarily coincide with its own national interests.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

A second term for President Trump will likely harden Washington's stance towards Beijing and entrench the consensus amongst American elites that US-China strategic competition amounts to a 'new Cold War.' Although the President himself is less prone to messianic visions of how this rivalry plays out – his 'America First' mantra has never been about stoking the embers of American exceptionalism, but rather a desire to see that the United States get its way in the world – key figures in the administration have made a concerted effort in recent months to articulate a more assertive US posture towards China: on trade, the South China Sea, cyber and human rights among other issues. In the case of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, this position amounts to the virtual adoption of an ideological crusade in the name of the 'free world' against the forces of 'tyranny.' The ongoing fallout from China's initial handling of the coronavirus means a coalescence of antagonism towards China in the US debate, one that draws on economic, security and health concerns. That will only further buttress strong public support for the White House's tough China stance. A recent Harvard CAPS-Harris [poll](#), for instance, found that 53 per cent of the US respondents identified China as the United States' primary 'enemy', whilst 73 per cent placed the responsibility for new global tensions at Beijing's door.

There can be little doubt that a re-elected Trump will feel emboldened to push China further on a range of policy fronts, in a way that will make allies in Asia, and not just Australia, increasingly nervous. Ironically, just as the administration gears up for the long-haul in its rivalry in

China and declares that it will not easily cede its primacy in Asia, the missionary zeal with which it now frames its China policy is likely to alienate the very allies it seeks to assuage. Unless there is a radical overhaul in American elite thinking – or unless Trump suddenly makes a play for history – a second Trump term will take Washington further and further away from working out a mutually accepted geopolitical status quo with Beijing.

**THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT A RE-ELECTED TRUMP WILL FEEL EMBOLDENED TO PUSH CHINA FURTHER ON A RANGE OF POLICY FRONTS, IN A WAY THAT WILL MAKE ALLIES IN ASIA, AND NOT JUST AUSTRALIA, INCREASINGLY NERVOUS.**

Whilst hardliners in Washington see close alignment with Canberra's China policy, they will probably want to press for more, even as US-Australian cooperation in the Indo-Pacific ramps up. But Canberra may again have to find further opportunities, as it did in the recent Australia-US Ministerial Consultations, of clarifying precisely where, and where it will not, fall into line with US objectives. Above all, it will need to resist the pressure to join in what looks to be the unstoppable momentum towards a US-led containment policy of China.

# EUROPE AND ALLIANCES

BY GORANA GRGIC



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Should Joe Biden become the 46th president of the United States, there will undoubtedly be a [lot of sighs of relief around the European capitals](#). A Biden presidency is poised to have an instantaneous and curative effect on transatlantic relations, at least on a symbolic level. The former [vice president has been unequivocal](#) about his intention to repair relations with traditional allies and re-enter various intergovernmental agreements and organisations president Trump left. However, one should not forget that even with the most well-meaning leader in the White House, transatlantic relations are bound to be mired by issues that stem from the different positions the United States and its European allies occupy in the international system, shifting US strategic priorities, and the imperatives of responding to the health and economic crises resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

**EVEN WITH THE MOST WELL-MEANING LEADER IN THE WHITE HOUSE, TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS ARE BOUND TO BE MIRED BY ISSUES THAT STEM FROM THE DIFFERENT POSITIONS THE UNITED STATES AND ITS EUROPEAN ALLIES OCCUPY IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM, SHIFTING US STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, AND THE IMPERATIVES OF RESPONDING TO THE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CRISES RESULTING FROM THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.**

In the eight decades since the transatlantic war effort, it has always been clear the relations between the two sides of the Atlantic have never been a relationship between equals. Consecutive US governments lamented the [EU's inability to act decisively](#), as well as criticised European NATO member-states' [inadequate levels](#)

[of military spending](#). At the same time, European leaders have been equally critical of the [American penchant for unilateralism](#) and [undermining efforts](#) meant to enhance European political and military clout. These structural issues will not be solved by one US president.

However, they will be mitigated through deft diplomacy and focus on areas of policy commonalities. Thus, under a President Biden, one can expect significant and strong action on policy areas where there have been major u-turns during the Trump presidency. [Climate action](#) and arms control are on top of that list. Furthermore, more effort on [coordinating a policy response to China](#), particularly on trade, security and human rights is likely. A Biden administration will undoubtedly have [a more coherent Russia policy](#), which will provide plenty of space for cooperation with European counterparts in realms such as military deployments, arms control, cyber policy, intelligence coordination and anti-money-laundering efforts. There is no doubt that Joe Biden's political appointees at the State Department will be much better equipped to address complex policy issues, so the world will be spared the discombobulation of the past years on US foreign policy in places like [Ukraine](#) or [the Balkans](#).

An area that might prove to be more contentious involves jumpstarting the negotiations over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), particularly if the November elections bring in [a blue wave in the Congress](#) with more progressive members. Yet, the administration will likely work towards strengthening the World Trade Organization (WTO) in light of the challenges mounted by the Trump administration over recent years.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

Over the past decade, multiple domestic crises consumed a lot of policymaking bandwidth and made the United States and Europe look inward. The Obama administration patched up the strained US-European relations from the Bush years and delivered significant progress on vital policy issues as a result of transatlantic cooperation. Yet, even though President Obama [enjoyed a broad degree of popularity in Europe](#) throughout his two terms in office, his tenure was not spared [notable disagreements](#) and [even outright divergence](#) with the European allies.

However, ever since President Trump's election, it has become commonplace to characterise the recent dynamics of US-European relations as on a precipitous downward spiral. The two sides of the Atlantic have disagreed on a number of critical policy fronts including trade, climate change, nuclear proliferation and arms control. But this diagnosis obfuscates the fact the Trump administration has been able to win support from some of its European allies – mostly those in [Central and Eastern Europe](#) – in initiatives that span [military cooperation](#), [energy policy](#) and novel [regional diplomatic cooperation](#).

Four more years of a Trump administration would undoubtedly see the continuation of unilateralism as evidenced in the [imposition of tariffs](#), withdrawal from jointly negotiated treaties and deals, and the lack of US coordination with European counterparts on issues ranging from climate change to relations with China. [NATO summits would be likely to continue to end with](#)

[impasses](#) at best, or worse yet, the alliance could witness the deepening of the greatest internal crisis in the post-Cold War era. It could also be more likely to see the [continuation of the Trump administration's alignment with European populist leaders and illiberal regimes](#), thus widening the chasm between the European states themselves.

**EVER SINCE PRESIDENT TRUMP'S ELECTION, IT HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE TO CHARACTERISE THE RECENT DYNAMICS OF US-EUROPEAN RELATIONS AS ON A PRECIPITOUS DOWNWARD SPIRAL.**

Energy diplomacy will be worth watching during a second Trump term. This is a policy area the administration has paid particular attention to; from its [strong promotion of US liquefied natural gas \(LNG\) exports](#) to ramping up of [sanctions on those involved in the Nord Stream II project](#). However, key questions remain over how the global slump in energy demand and the European Union's (EU's) pledge for an economic recovery based on the European 'Green Deal' aspirations will affect the transatlantic LNG trade. Should global energy prices remain low, US LNG projects will become increasingly unprofitable and result in depressed energy exports. On the other hand, if the pandemic-induced recession deepens, the EU's commitment to a green transition might be deprioritised, thus leaving the opening for more American LNG exports.

# THE MIDDLE EAST

BY JARED MONDSCHHEIN



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

For the second time in a dozen years, a Democratic presidential campaign featuring Joe Biden is pledging to make a reversal from the Republican incumbent in regards to US policy on the Middle East.

It is hard to overstate how dissimilar 2020 is from 2008, when Joe Biden joined the Obama ticket. Back then, few issues were more prominent and politically charged than US policy on the Middle East – particularly for US allies like Australia, which saw support for the United States plummet and some of its largest protests of all time take place. Furthermore, the policy differences between the Obama-Biden and the McCain-Palin presidential tickets were dramatic, with the Democratic campaign pledging to decrease US troops levels in the region and the Republican ticket pledging the opposite.

A dozen years later, US policy in the Middle East has taken a back seat to US policy on strategic competition with China, criticisms of globalisation, and, in fact, practically everything else. It was an unprecedented act of terror in the United States that led to the Bush administration's War on Terror and invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, yet terrorism today ranks [last](#) in a list of ten issues that Americans deem to be a “very big problem in the country today.” Climate change, violent crime, unemployment, government ethics, and racial injustice are all deemed more important.

The size of the differences in Middle East policy between the Democratic and Republican tickets is also less dramatic than before. Biden is expected to remain somewhat consistent with the Trump administration on some key issues,

including maintaining both strong support of Israel and a deeply felt scepticism of committing further US troops to the Middle East. Biden has also pledged to keep the US embassy in Jerusalem and has previously [called himself a Zionist](#).

**BIDEN IS EXPECTED TO REMAIN SOMEWHAT CONSISTENT WITH THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ON SOME KEY ISSUES, INCLUDING MAINTAINING BOTH STRONG SUPPORT OF ISRAEL AND A DEEPLY FELT SCEPTICISM OF COMMITTING FURTHER US TROOPS TO THE MIDDLE EAST.**

Nonetheless, such similarities should not mask critical differences between the two men's views of the region. A Biden administration would likely result in an attempt at restoring the “Iran Deal” and a greater prioritisation of human rights in bilateral efforts with nations like Saudi Arabia. Most notably, however, it is unlikely that a Biden administration would seek to use the Middle East in a tactical and explicitly political fashion as the Trump administration has, particularly on issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Australia should not presume that a Biden administration automatically entails more strategic adherence to an Indo-Pacific strategy. A seasoned politician like Joe Biden knows too well the costs of withdrawing US attention from the Middle East too hastily.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

Practically all US presidents have looked overseas when faced with an oppositional Congress at home. This is the natural by-product of the US constitution, which significantly limits a president's authority on domestic policies but offers few limitations to a president's powers abroad.

That the Trump administration shifted to focus overseas was not unpredictable, nor exceptional. Yet the extent to which the Trump administration has viewed the Middle East as a region for ephemeral tactical wins, many of which have heavy political overtones, is.

The Trump administration has so far recognised Israeli sovereignty over disputed territory, moved the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, sought to decrease US "boots on the ground" in the region regardless of the strategic rationale, and killed the most prominent Iranian general. With these actions, the Trump administration has made it difficult to look beyond what appears to be impulsive tactics, many of which are aimed at bolstering domestic political support. While these moves have generally not resulted in substantial blowback many expected, it nonetheless remains unclear what the United States gained strategically beyond being seen as unpredictable – which ultimately can alienate allies just as much as it can keep adversaries off-balance.

Such allies include Australia, which has maintained [thousands](#) of troops in the Middle East alongside US forces. Yet nearly two decades after the 9/11 attacks, the importance of US-Australian efforts in the region have undoubtedly decreased in recent years. There is some debate as to whether the Middle East should

merit attention alongside the Indo-Pacific, but there is an increasingly bipartisan view in both the United States and Australia that the priority of the Indo-Pacific theatre is increasing. The evidence of this can be seen in the [joint statement](#) resulting from the most recent Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) – which reflects the Trump and Morrison administrations' bilateral priorities – in that it does not mention the Middle East whatsoever.

Tensions in the Middle East can still quickly escalate and force the region to once again become a focus for US-Australian relations but any diverted attention will most likely be a temporary shift and not meriting of further long-term commitments.

**THAT THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION SHIFTED TO FOCUS OVERSEAS WAS NOT UNPREDICTABLE, NOR EXCEPTIONAL. YET THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HAS VIEWED THE MIDDLE EAST AS A REGION FOR EPHEMERAL TACTICAL WINS, MANY OF WHICH HAVE HEAVY POLITICAL OVERTONES, IS.**

Should President Trump be re-elected, he will likely continue to seek the sort of tactical wins that may temporarily require diverted attention. For another four years of the Trump administration, Australia will be forced to continue carrying out an ever more extensive and robust Indo-Pacific strategy while mitigating the destabilising and ephemeral impulses of a US president whose administration developed an Indo-Pacific strategy but who is, at an individual level, not strategic.



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

A Biden administration can be expected to pursue a more cooperative approach to international trade negotiations and will need to decide what to do with some of the Trump administration's trade policies.

### Regional deals

Biden may make an early effort to rejoin the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which would be welcomed by existing members. Biden would need to secure the support of Congress and may face opposition from Democratic members of Congress.

Biden could also be expected to restart the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations and use these to remove some of the Trump administration's tariffs on EU imports.

Existing bilateral deals, such as the Trump administration's deal with Japan, could be folded into these broader regional deals. A Democratic administration could be expected to elevate environmental and labour rights standards in its international agreements.

### China

The Chinese commitments to improved intellectual property protections in its phase one trade deal are viewed as worth salvaging and Biden may seek a way to do this while ditching the purchasing commitments and using the prospect of the removal of tariffs as leverage in new trade negotiations. However, Congress and the Biden administration can still be expected to maintain a tough stance with respect to China. The Biden campaign has already indicated an increased focus on the resilience of domestic supply chains and will implement 'buy American' measures designed to decouple from China with respect to critical goods and services.

### World Trade Organization

Biden could be expected to take a more constructive and engaged approach to the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, it is worth recalling that US concerns about the WTO pre-date Trump and the United States is likely to remain dissatisfied with the way the WTO functions.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

A re-elected Trump administration can be expected to continue with a mercantilist trade policy focused on narrowing US trade deficits through bilateral agreements at the expense of broader trade agreements and multilateral processes.

In practice, this means a continued imposition of ad hoc tariffs under various executive authorities and the delegation of commerce powers from Congress to the president. These tariffs will likely be tied to various trade negotiations in an effort to pursue better outcomes, although in prac-

tice will only serve to further complicate these negotiations.

### China

China is lagging on its 'phase one' trade deal purchasing commitments, which were always rather heroic, but the global economic downturn due to the pandemic has made living up to the terms of this agreement almost impossible. The phase one deal provides sufficient release clauses that would provide the two parties with an out with respect to these purchases while preserving other elements of the agreement.

The Trump administration will need to decide whether it walks away from the agreement, which it can do without congressional authorisation, or try and salvage the agreement as the basis for a 'phase two' negotiation that seeks to build on the useful elements of the deal, which include Chinese commitments to significantly enhance intellectual property protections.

However, the Trump administration is torn between claiming victory for its phase one deal and Trump's urge to decouple from China. US sanctions against Chinese entities and other measures aimed at reducing dependence on China, some of which have congressional support, may be ramped-up to the point where the US and Chinese economies continue to decouple, in contrast to the phase one trade deal, which sought to bind them more closely together.

Trump will likely keep in place existing section 301 tariffs against China and impose further tariffs if the phase one trade deal collapses.

For its part, China is also inclined to pursue greater self-sufficiency and indigenous innovation, so an even more hostile Trump adminis-

tration would play into this policy agenda. It is quite likely Beijing would be happy to see Trump re-elected given the damage his administration has done to key alliance relationships. The president's protectionism is a manageable problem from a Chinese perspective, certainly compared to China's many other pressing issues.

### Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminum

These tariffs will likely remain in place, although may be removed as part of the administration's negotiations with affected countries. Australia's continued exemption will depend in part on the extent to which Australian producers exploit their competitive advantage under these tariffs.

### Europe and car tariffs

A re-elected Trump administration may open up a new trade war front with the EU in relation to automotive tariffs, in addition to tariffs designed to retaliate against EU digital services taxes and tariffs authorised by the WTO, which were in retaliation to EU subsidies for Airbus. Australian automotive exports to the United States are potentially at risk from car tariffs, and a revival of Australia's proposed digital services tax could see Australia targeted with section 301 tariffs.

### World Trade Organization

A Trump administration can be expected to continue to undermine the World Trade Organization by blocking appointments to the Appellate Body and the appointment of a new Director-General. The administration has shown little interest in joining efforts to reform the WTO and is unlikely to be supportive of new rounds of multilateral trade liberalisation.

# ECONOMIC RECOVERY

BY DAVID UREN



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Joe Biden has vowed to resist a global slide to protectionism and to restore American commitment to the institutions that govern global economic and security relations.

Biden has indicated he is open to signing the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CTPP) subject to it meeting US needs, saying the United States cannot afford to be isolated by rejecting all trade deals. An American commitment to global institutions is likely to include the revival of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) capacity to resolve disputes, which had been undercut by the Trump administration's refusal to endorse new adjudicators.

**A BIDEN VICTORY WOULD NOT RESOLVE THE TRADE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA, WHICH MAY INDEED INTENSIFY UNDER A BIDEN PLAN TO ESTABLISH A UNITED FRONT OF DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES TO CONFRONT IT.**

Australia would welcome a recommitment by the United States to global institutions and alliances, however, the Biden campaign's promise to resist protectionism is qualified by its "Buy American" program, which would seek to exclude foreign companies from US Government tenders and, if necessary, amend WTO rules to enable preferential treatment for national businesses.

Australian firms have some protection granted by the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement which includes rights to participate in US Government procurement, but the policy stance indicates the United States retreat from open trade that has gathered pace since the global financial crisis would not be reversed.

A Biden victory would not resolve the trade conflict between the United States and China, which may indeed intensify under a Biden plan to establish a united front of democratic countries to confront it. However, Australia would be less likely to suffer the collateral damage to which it is vulnerable when the United States seeks to resolve its trade conflicts through unilateral deals.

The Biden campaign is also promising a partial reversal of the Trump administration's corporate tax cuts. Although economists disagree over how much those tax cuts have supported US investment, raising the corporate tax rate may have a dampening effect on the US recovery from the coronavirus.

The Biden tax plan includes an increase in the effective US tax on foreign investments in low tax jurisdictions which would be expected to result in a sharp fall in US offshore investment. As a high tax jurisdiction, this will not affect Australia directly but may contribute to a general retreat from offshore investment that has been underway since the Trump administration's tax package took effect in 2018.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

A re-elected Trump administration could be expected to press ahead with its “America First” policy, boosting tax support for US business as it seeks to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, maintaining pressure on the US Federal Reserve to keep rates low and pursuing an aggressive approach to world trade, particularly with China.

**THE POTENTIAL FOR THE UNILATERAL APPROACHES FAVOURED BY THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TO UNDERCUT AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN SHOWN WITH THE “PHASE ONE” DEAL WITH CHINA, UNDER WHICH THE UNITED STATES IS LIKELY TO GAIN BARLEY SALES IN CHINA AT AUSTRALIA’S EXPENSE.**

The US economy performed strongly under the early Trump administration, with growth lifting and unemployment falling, until the policy responses to the pandemic precipitated a global recession.

There is debate about the extent to which the Trump administration’s company tax cuts contributed to the increase in growth, however business investment has been [strong](#).

Further support to large business has been granted in response to the pandemic, with US\$510 billion made available in loans and advances, while Trump is insisting on payroll tax cuts in the next round of emergency support.

Share markets have responded favourably to the fiscal stimulus and the monetary policy response from the US Federal Reserve, anticipating a strong bounce in growth over the next year. President Trump predicts share values will reach record levels by election day.

The correlation between the US and Australian economic growth rates has slipped from very high levels over the past two decades as Australia’s economy has become more integrated with Asia. However, in general, it is still the case that what is good for the United States is [good for Australia](#).

Australia’s economy is more exposed to risk from US trade policy. A re-elected Trump administration would be more likely to intensify trade disputes with allies and potentially withdraw from the WTO.

Lacking unilateral negotiating power, Australia depends on the WTO rules framework to underwrite its global trade relations.

The potential for the unilateral approaches favoured by the Trump administration to undercut Australia has been shown with the “phase one” deal with China, under which the United States is likely to gain barley sales in China at Australia’s expense, while Australian liquefied natural gas (LNG) and beef exports to China are also vulnerable.



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Technology policy wonks have been critical of Biden's campaign for not having a dedicated technology position. However, given the failure of the Clinton 2016 campaign to cut-through against Donald Trump despite taking a significant policy playbook to voters, it's most likely the Biden campaign is just focusing elsewhere.

**BIDEN HAS RECENTLY ANNOUNCED A COMMITMENT OF A US\$300 BILLION INVESTMENT IN R&D DURING HIS FIRST TERM DIRECTED TO NEW INDUSTRIES LIKE BATTERY TECHNOLOGY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, BIOTECHNOLOGY AND CLEAN ENERGY WITH A FOCUS ACROSS DIVERSE POPULATIONS AND REGIONS.**

Education is one area critical to innovation where Biden has given some indication of his priorities. In this Joe Biden has a strong asset in his wife, Dr Jill Biden, who has been an educator for more than 30 years, most recently as a professor of English at a community college. Community colleges generally offer two-year 'associate degrees' and can act as a stepping stone to a 'bachelor degree' at university, making them often a less expensive way of attaining qualifications.

More equitable access to education from birth right through to college is a strong part of the Biden policy platform. This echoes the Obama administration focus on education as a means of building the right skills for new jobs.

This focus on new jobs is clear. Biden has recently announced a commitment of a US\$300 billion investment in R&D during his first term directed to new industries like battery technology, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and clean energy with a focus across diverse populations and regions. The aim is to create five million new, well-paid jobs in response to the jobs lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One other area of interest from a technology and innovation perspective is a specific call-out of 5G technology, with a two-part impact. The line: "A Biden administration will join together with our democratic allies to develop secure, private sector-led 5G networks, leaving no community – rural or low-income – behind," hints at an openness to work with allies like Australia, an early adopter of 5G technology, to address an issue endemic to both countries: the challenge of connectivity for rural populations. However, the challenge of developing a 'secure, private-sector-led' 5G investment in the face of China's leadership in the sector should not be underestimated.

Australia's leaders have announced accelerated funding for infrastructure projects and for skills in demand now, but this seems short-sighted in the face of the phenomenal shifts being driven by COVID-19. Biden's plan to invest in new industries is visionary compared to Australia's.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

While history may judge the Trump administration harshly for many failures, space is one arena where significant steps forward have been made. Space appears to have captured the president's imagination, with increased budget allocation and significant space management policy shifts under his tenure. President Trump's 2018 "Space Force" announcement was a surprise, and yet, what the Trump Space Force memes don't bring to the fore is the extent to which this renewed focus on space has reinvigorated both US and allies efforts and what this may have set in motion for future prosperity.

To a certain extent, the renewed focus by the United States has been spurred on by the recognition in Washington that other nations are pushing into the space domain. China, in particular, has made significant strides in its space program in recent years. While the United States banned cooperation with China on space in 2011 due to national security concerns, it has been relying on Russia to get its astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS). Indeed the SpaceX rocket that took American astronauts to the ISS in May, 2020, was the first human space flight launched on American soil in a decade.

Looking beyond 2020, the Trump administration budget request for NASA increases by 12 per cent for FY2021 with emphasis on commercially developed technology. The United States not only leads on government space spending, but it has also kickstarted much of the global space economy, with private companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin emerging as viable commercial space operators. Much of the hype is about space tourism, however, two areas where the

impact of humanity on the earth is causing stress – vaccine development and agriculture – have future potential. The global space industry is estimated to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.6 per cent to be worth US\$558 billion by 2026.

The United States has a strong history of investing in defence R&D and reaping a spillover benefit in the commercial realm with profits flowing back to the United States. Post-2020, a Trump administration will be looking to bolster the economy. Space, which captures the imagination of commercial operators and military hawks alike, and holds enormous future economic potential is a new realm of possibility.

**SPACE APPEARS TO HAVE CAPTURED THE PRESIDENT'S IMAGINATION, WITH INCREASED BUDGET ALLOCATION AND SIGNIFICANT SPACE MANAGEMENT POLICY SHIFTS UNDER HIS TENURE.**

Australia has managed to secure a seat at the table in the renewed focus on space. A letter of intent to include Australian businesses in the NASA space supply chain was one of the big wins from the state visit by Prime Minister Morrison in 2019. How this plays out as the United States emerges from pandemic-induced economic challenges is unclear in a Trump second term, particularly in light of 'America First.' However, as the SpaceX Dragon launch has clearly shown, NASA is reliant on the commercial sector as it has never been before. Australia should double down on the space industry as a future bet and hold the Trump administration to its commitments.

# REGULATION OF TECHNOLOGY

BY ZOE MEERS



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

In July 2020, the Democratic-led House of Representatives convened an antitrust investigation against big US tech companies, with corporate leaders such as Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, Sundar Pichai of Microsoft, and Tim Cook of Apple testifying under oath in front of the committee. While the meeting concerned all aspects of power and competition wielded by technology monopolies, a significant portion focused on rules surrounding the spread of disinformation as well as lack of action by one particular social network – Facebook – to enforce rules against the spread of malicious information surrounding the election.

Presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden formally stated little on big tech and disinformation until mid-2020. In June, the Biden campaign [urged](#) its millions of followers to sign a petition against Facebook’s free speech rules in a rebuke against what Democratic partisans see as a lack of regulation concerning political ads and political fact-checking. Representative Cicilline, a Democrat member of congress representing Rhode Island and the head of the antitrust subcommittee in the US Congress, [stated](#) that a new Biden administration will likely enact the committee’s recommendations regulating big tech companies in 2021. Although Biden is ostensibly a moderate candidate, he tends to move in the same direction as his party, which is taking an increasingly hard-line in cracking down on data privacy and the right to accurate information on social media.

As vice president of the United States, Biden enjoyed an amicable relationship with the technology community in Silicon Valley and, prior to 2020, was seemingly reluctant to antagonise his big tech supporters. But with the recent push for further regulation against the spread of disinformation in American political discourse, the Biden campaign has actively taken a stance against social media activity that poses a threat to free and fair elections.

**BIDEN TENDS TO MOVE IN THE SAME DIRECTION AS HIS PARTY, WHICH IS TAKING AN INCREASINGLY HARD-LINE IN CRACKING DOWN ON DATA PRIVACY AND THE RIGHT TO ACCURATE INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA.**

The Australian Government should join the Biden administration in moving towards the regulation of big tech, particularly as it pertains to the spread of disinformation and misinformation on social media. What concerns the American political discourse is soon to affect Australian domestic politics as well. Australia’s democracy is only as stable as its democratic allies, particularly the United States. Australians must receive and recognise correct information regarding politics, and – particularly during COVID-19 and conspiracy theories increasingly becoming mainstream – it is within the interests of the Australian Government to ensure political falsehoods are eliminated from social media.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

Since taking office in January 2017, the Trump administration has deregulated businesses to speed up economic vitalisation and the technology industry has benefited from sweeping tax cuts. But personal and public support in Silicon Valley for a second Trump victory is hard to find, with few well-known tech entrepreneurs willing to throw their name – and money – behind his campaign. President Trump's behaviour on technology platforms is somewhat contradictory with his views: in spite of being a heavy Twitter user, he has stated on Twitter that he believes the company is censoring conservative political opinions.

American conservatives have embraced the antitrust commission, with Attorney General William Barr and the US Federal Trade Commission testifying in favour of technology regulation. Together with Democrats, Republican operatives are calling for further curtailing of technology companies in the United States – but for different reasons. The GOP aims to regulate big tech to stem anti-conservative bias whereas the Democratic Party is calling for regulation of big tech due to the proliferation of disinformation on technology platforms.

The Trump administration has yet to produce any reform against disinformation on social media. In fact, the administration shows signs of doing the complete opposite: President Trump has spread disinformation himself on voting by mail and electoral integrity. As a result, there appears to be little incentive for a second Trump administration to regulate social media companies on this disinformation.

Whether this chasm between the Republican Party and the president on tech deregulation will close remains unclear. What is clear, however, is President Trump's unorthodox approach to politics. Unlike the Democratic Party, in which political candidates tend to be responsive to popular mood and adjust policy accordingly, Republican elites and supporters have, in the past three years, begun to shift towards the president's views – regardless of official party platform – quickly endorsing his viewpoints and changing the party-line in rapid succession.

**THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AIMS TO REGULATE BIG TECH TO STEM ANTI-CONSERVATIVE BIAS WHEREAS THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IS CALLING FOR REGULATION OF BIG TECH DUE TO THE PROLIFERATION OF DISINFORMATION ON TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS.**

It is crucial that the Australian Government prepares for the further spread of disinformation on social media. Despite the recent call for a working group between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the US State Department to fight disinformation in the Indo-Pacific region, little has been accomplished bilaterally to prepare for the disinformation war in the domestic political arena. While this has not been a huge issue so far in Australian politics, the ramifications of an American president being re-elected based on disinformation campaigns and amid the contexts of heightened geopolitical tensions should be a cause of great concern for the Australian Government.

# STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY COMPETITION

BY BRENDAN THOMAS-NOONE



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

A Biden presidency will very likely continue many of the Trump administration's policies that are driving a 'decoupling' of the US and China's science and technology ecosystems. Expanded export controls, outright bans on Chinese universities and corporations linked to the Chinese military and restrictions on foreign investment in key technology start-ups are all likely to remain. But in two critical areas, the Biden administration is very likely to adjust the way President Trump has pursued strategic technology competition with China: more fully frame China's political system as one of "digital authoritarianism," and push to compete by reinvesting at home, bolstering US spending on research and development.

**IN TWO CRITICAL AREAS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IS VERY LIKELY TO ADJUST THE WAY PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS PURSUED STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY COMPETITION WITH CHINA: MORE FULLY FRAME CHINA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM AS ONE OF "DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM," AND PUSH TO COMPETE BY REINVESTING AT HOME, BOLSTERING US SPENDING ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.**

Across the ideological spectrum in the United States, politicians, analysts and advocates have increasingly [called out](#) China's intellectual property theft, its drift towards 'digital authoritarianism' and Beijing's exportation of these technologies to other countries around the world. Influential progressive voices like [Bernie Sanders](#), [Pete Buttigieg](#), Elizabeth Warren and Biden himself have all singled out China and its technological practices.

Analysts, think-tankers and Democratic foreign policy professionals in Washington have also [turned their attention](#) to the potential danger of China's mastery of emerging technologies, particularly as Beijing has sought new markets for surveillance and digital infrastructure outside Europe and North America. While the Trump administration has focused on IP theft and security issues when it has come to China as an emerging technological power, a Biden administration may be more likely to fully institutionalise the ideological framing, with a more consistent, comprehensive and clearer differentiation and contrast between the liberal role of emerging technologies in shaping society and China's more authoritarian approach. This may have significant implications for US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific.

A Biden win will also add ballast to the growing calls in Washington for the United States to compete with China by investing in its own scientific and technological capability. Over the past two years, there has been [growing recognition](#) in Washington that in order to compete with China over the long term, doubling down on 'protecting' the United States' innovation and scientific base and relying on its inherent advantages would not be enough.

There are indications of an emerging consensus. A significant and bipartisan bill has recently been [put forward](#) in Congress that would see a not insignificant injection of funds in the National Science Foundation as well as enacting substantial reform. The Biden campaign has released a similar policy platform, [promising to invest](#) US\$300 billion in technologies ranging from electric vehicles to lightweight materials and artificial intelligence.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

The Trump administration – and particularly the president himself – have been erratic in defining the terms of the United States’ self-described competition with China since the publication of the 2017 National Security Strategy. Trade imbalances, China’s rapid modernisation of its military and ideological differences have all featured as reasons for Washington’s growing rivalry with Beijing. But as the end of the President’s first term nears, technology has undoubtedly become the central feature of this competition and would continue as such if he were to be re-elected.

Over the past four years, the administration [has conducted](#) a disaggregated and disjointed – but generally effective – campaign to decouple the United States and China’s science and technology ecosystems. The White House has restricted the ability of Chinese science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) students to study in the United States, the Justice Department has launched a wide-ranging campaign to prosecute intellectual property (IP) theft in all fifty states and the Commerce Department is working on new export controls that will seek to bring new strategically vital dual-use technologies under the purview of the government.

A second term Trump administration would continue – and in some cases double down – on these policies, focusing on the ‘protection’ of the US scientific and innovation industrial base. Immigration restrictions and the growing criminal justice campaign, in particular, are two key issues likely to be expanded. The administration [will continue](#) placing limits on Chinese graduate students studying STEM subjects in American universities as well as implementing

additional policies deterring their entry into the country. Similarly, Attorney General William Barr will continue to press the Justice Department to bring criminal cases on individuals and institutions conducting technological espionage and IP theft. Critically, both areas do not require further congressional action in order for the administration to continue or expand its policies.

### **A SECOND TERM TRUMP ADMINISTRATION WOULD CONTINUE – AND IN SOME CASES DOUBLE DOWN – ON THESE POLICIES, FOCUSING ON THE ‘PROTECTION’ OF THE UNITED STATES SCIENTIFIC AND INNOVATION INDUSTRIAL BASE.**

During its first term, the Trump administration has focused on decoupling Chinese technology companies from the United States. This has to date largely focused on state-owned enterprises and high-profile tech titans like Huawei and ZTE. During a possible second term, the focus is set to expand. The world’s most valuable start-up and highly popular social media app, TikTok – owned by China-based ByteDance – is [under threat](#) of being banned entirely by Trump administration officials due to data and privacy concerns. President Trump has given a September deadline for an American company to purchase ByteDance’s US operations, which includes the demand that a portion of the sale goes to the US Department of Treasury. However, should this fail, the banning of the app may finally bring the full implications of a complete US-China technological decoupling home for many American voters and consumers.

# AUSTRALIA IN DC

BY BRUCE WOLPE



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Situational awareness of what a Biden administration means for Australia: First and foremost it is China, China, China, and truly understanding the relationship President Biden wants with China and how he proposes to secure it. Biden will be muscular and assertive on China, but with greater efforts to get to more workable outcomes. This will present a transitional issue for Australia in that China has increasingly seen Australia as “all in” with Trump, with quite punitive and confrontational consequences. A very visible alignment with President Biden will need to be executed to pull China back from the brink with Australia and put in place more business-like arrangements.

**A VERY VISIBLE ALIGNMENT WITH PRESIDENT BIDEN WILL NEED TO BE EXECUTED TO PULL CHINA BACK FROM THE BRINK WITH AUSTRALIA AND PUT IN PLACE MORE BUSINESS-LIKE ARRANGEMENTS.**

We can anticipate that the foreign policy, national security and trade teams assembled by the new president will be composed of thoroughly experienced officials of Obama-Clinton vintage who have been deeply involved in issues affecting Australia for many years. Those relationships will be easy to establish and work effectively.

Capitol Hill becomes much more important to Australia under a Biden presidency, especially if the Democrats take the Senate. As a creature of the Senate, Biden will want to work in tandem with the lawmakers, using congressional processes to build support for his initiatives and ratify his policies in spending and legislation. Working with the key committees in both houses – Foreign Affairs, Armed Services, Intelligence, Appropriations – will be essential. It is a lot of ground to cover. Fortunately, Australia can build on the excellent work of the Friends of Australia Caucus in the House and Senate.

The Australian embassy in Washington should be staffed up under any election outcome. There has never been more coverage of Australia in the US media than over the past four years, from the Trump-Turnbull phone call to the bushfires and the pandemic. More media capabilities would further enhance Australia’s profile in Washington. If the Democrats win both the Senate and House, the congressional liaison staff should be expanded – regardless of whether it is President Trump or Biden. Australia needs the power of the Hill behind it to be felt and heard loud and clear in the Oval Office.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

Situational awareness in Washington of four more years of Trump is crucial to building on Australia's successes in the first term. The bilateral relationship has been (perhaps with the exception of Israel) the best of any two countries during Trump's presidency. Currently, President Trump sees no daylight between himself and Australia, so the trick is to keep it that way.

First will be to manage the upheaval on the inside. There will be massive changes in the White House and in the cabinet, executed by President Trump exacting vengeance against all those perceived to be ineffectual or worse in securing his second term. As was the case in his meting out justice after impeachment, Trump will purge those perceived as disloyal.

Australia has had excellent access to those closest to the president, but the task will be picking up the pieces after the house cleaning. For those near the Oval: will the chief of staff Mark Meadows continue? Will Jared Kushner move back to New York? Will Peter Navarro and Robert Lighthizer continue to lead on trade? Will Robert O'Brien remain head of National Security Council, and will there be a shakeup for the directors of National Intelligence and the CIA? Similarly, in the cabinet, the exits of the Secretary of State (Pompeo has political aspirations), Defense (Esper has tried Trump's patience on multiple issues) and Treasury (Mnuchin has second-term Wall Street riches ahead of him) should be anticipated. Their positions are the key strategic contact points for Australia.

As Australia is not aligned in lockstep with an even more aggressive Trump agenda, ensuring immediate access at the highest levels becomes critical. This needs to be matched with a further deepening of ties with Vice President Pence, who will be seen as a frontrunner to win the Republican nomination in 2024. The VP can be a crucial insurance policy when Trump initiatives pose deep threats to Australia's strategic interests.

**AS AUSTRALIA IS NOT ALIGNED IN LOCKSTEP WITH AN EVEN MORE AGGRESSIVE TRUMP AGENDA, ENSURING IMMEDIATE ACCESS AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS BECOMES CRITICAL.**

Second is to manage the playing field outside the White House. Congress in a second Trump term is important but less influential for Australia's interests. President Trump has no patience with Congress. If the Democrats win the Senate, his most important ally, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, will be relegated to having only negative power, and become more of a blocker against a Democratic agenda as opposed to an engineer of the Trump agenda. Australia should resort to a "break glass in emergency" strategy when Australia's friends on the Hill can be called on to work the House and Senate to curb Trump foreign policy or trade excesses.

# WHITE HOUSE CAPACITY

BY V. KIM HOGGARD



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

The task is enormous for Joe Biden to meet the challenges of governing a divided country facing an historic set of crises after four tumultuous years. Biden has said he is ready to “hit the ground running” on day one of his presidency. As a former senator and two-term vice president, he is well qualified to do so, as was George HW Bush, who said after his presidential election, “I know how to begin... .” The depth of experience and the political and diplomatic relationships Biden has built over decades in Washington would ensure a return to more stability.

**AUSTRALIA, AS A LONGSTANDING AND TRUSTWORTHY ALLY, IS WELL PLACED TO REACH OUT AND RE-ESTABLISH IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS WITH A FULLY-STAFFED US GOVERNMENT NEEDING SUPPORT TO MEET GLOBAL CHALLENGES.**

Biden describes himself as a “transitional president” who can help grow the next generation of Democrats. His “unity task forces” have sought to unite the left-wing of the Democratic party leading up to the Democratic National Convention, working out major policy differences before the general election campaign. The results produced a governing agenda focused on criminal justice reform, climate change, the economy, education, healthcare and immigration. Biden has talked about creating new cabinet-level posts, including an Office of Science and Technology Policy, a Global Health Security Pandemic Office and a separate Climate Change operation that “goes beyond the EPA.”

Addressing the pandemic will dominate a significant portion of his first term.

Australia can expect a return to multilateralism, support for international institutions and a re-building of traditional US alliances, with a focus on democracies in the Asia-Pacific region. Biden stated, “all politics is personal, particularly international relations. You’ve got to know the other man or woman’s soul, and who they are, and make sure they know you.” The coronavirus pandemic will make it difficult, however, to hold his preferred face-to-face meetings with world leaders, or realise his planned international summits on climate change and democracies.

Biden’s most important US foreign policy objectives include easing tensions with China, pursuing an extension of the New Start nuclear treaty and reducing the role of nuclear weapons generally. Australia should be prepared for pressure to increase national carbon emission reduction targets as the United States re-joins the Paris Climate Accord.

The United States has reached a nadir under President Trump. Australia, as a longstanding and trustworthy ally, is well placed to reach out and re-establish important connections with a fully-staffed US Government needing support to meet global challenges. Australian leaders will have to find creative ways to engage from a distance to ensure its policies and priorities for the region, and beyond, are prominent.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

A re-elected Donald Trump, emboldened by the win, would still face momentous second-term challenges from the pandemic, a shattered economy and a national reckoning on racial injustice.

A deeply divided nation drowning in debt, distrust, high unemployment and inequity, confronts a president who never expected to win the first term. How to address the problems that have been building for decades in America, and the division over how to resolve them could lead to more confrontation and instability. Getting the attention of the President will present the greatest challenge to Australia's leaders whose issues will be far down the pecking order.

**A RE-ELECTED DONALD TRUMP, EMBOLDENED BY THE WIN, WOULD STILL FACE MOMENTOUS SECOND-TERM CHALLENGES FROM THE PANDEMIC, A SHATTERED ECONOMY AND A NATIONAL RECKONING ON RACIAL INJUSTICE.**

President Trump won in 2016 with a "Make America Great Again" slogan and no clear governing agenda, so it is not surprising that he has yet to outline his policies for the next four years. He is, however, unlikely to waiver from his "America First" doctrine when deciding issues around China, foreign policy, trade, immigration, deregulation, international institutions and agreements. One critical nuclear arms agreement, New Start, is due to expire in 2021 and runs the risk of not being renewed. This not only leaves Russia unchecked but potentially encourages other countries to further their own nuclear arsenals.

A president is only as effective as the people they have around them. If they are wise enough to be aware of their limitations, they draw on the expertise of others that they attracted into government. The choice of vice president is the most public example, as when Ronald Reagan chose George HW Bush for his extensive international experience. But in the day to day operation of the White House and the organisation, orchestration and implementation of policy, it is the key senior staff who play a critical role in the success of any presidency. In resolving those critical issues mentioned above Australia's diplomats will find challenges to developing relationships with the Americans, given Trump's penchant for firing and changing staff. This affects his ability to attract expertise in a second term. Numerous government positions remain unfilled or staffed with temporary appointments. Australia should keep an eye on whether there is an exodus from the White House before the election as often happens when a second term looks lost.

Australia will need to outline its policy agenda in ways that appear to help Trump both domestically and internationally, through an "America First" lens to ensure they are not amongst the multitude of problems greeting the president each morning.

# INDO-PACIFIC DEFENCE STRATEGY

BY ASHLEY TOWNSEND



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

There is likely to be a good deal of continuity in the way a Biden administration approaches US defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Owing to broad bipartisan support for the 2018 National Defense Strategy, many of its core tenants are already infusing the thinking of Biden's (admittedly quite large) foreign policy and defence team. This includes agreement on the need to wind-down US military operations in the Middle East, strengthen conventional deterrence by denial vis-à-vis China in the Indo-Pacific and invest more heavily in advanced research and emerging capabilities to maintain America's competitive military-technological edge. Although some of Biden's advisers [reject](#) the Trump administration's framework for strategic competition with China – mainly on the grounds that it is needlessly confrontational and does not identify a clear end-state objective – his team are by and large highly supportive of developing a more robust US defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

A Biden administration is likely to be more effective at working with allies and partners to advance a collective defence strategy. This will be welcomed by Australia and other Indo-Pacific allies. Alarmed by the way President Trump has adopted an aggressively transactional attitude towards most regional allies – and by his general disdain for the kind of international order that US allies comprise and support – many in the Biden campaign are committed to rebuilding alliances and refocusing them on a broader range of issues. This includes a greater awareness of and willingness to accommodate differences in allied interests, threat perceptions and contributions to collective action than has been the case over the past four years. It is likely to manifest in a more multidimensional approach towards the

roles and responsibilities of Indo-Pacific allies – doubling down on their function as regional order enhancers in the geoeconomic, technology, developmental and non-traditional security space – and a more systematic approach towards cultivating and coordinating allied contributions to defence cooperation and multinational deterrence effects.

**ALARMED BY THE WAY PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS ADOPTED AN AGGRESSIVELY TRANSACTIONAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS MOST REGIONAL ALLIES – AND BY HIS GENERAL DISDAIN FOR THE KIND OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER THAT US ALLIES COMPRISE AND SUPPORT – MANY IN THE BIDEN CAMPAIGN ARE COMMITTED TO REBUILDING ALLIANCES AND REFOCUSING THEM ON A BROADER RANGE OF ISSUES.**

It remains unclear whether a Biden administration will prioritise the Indo-Pacific to the same extent as the Trump administration has tried (not always successfully). While the Middle East drawdown is almost certain to continue, many in the Biden team are as concerned about Russian revanchism and NATO mistreatment as they are about developments in the Indo-Pacific. This, of course, is not an entirely zero-sum tradeoff. But in the process of working to restore the damage President Trump has done to the liberal international order, a Biden administration is unlikely to be as focussed on minimising the United States' strategic footprint in Europe as its declining defence resources require for an effective strategy in the Indo-Pacific.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

The defining feature of the Trump administration's approach to US defence strategy has been its effort to prioritise competition with China in the Indo-Pacific ahead of other global security commitments. In the 2018 National Defense Strategy, the administration went further than its predecessors in highlighting the urgent need to refocus the US military away from counterinsurgency missions in the Middle East towards preparations for high-intensity conflict with a great power competitor. It has also sharpened the focus on conventional deterrence by denial as the primary means by which the United States – alongside its allies and partners – will seek to dissuade Chinese aggression and uphold a favourable regional balance of power, even in the context of its declining military dominance.

**THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S INCREASINGLY CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH TOWARDS CHINA IS ALIENATING ALLIES AND PARTNERS INSTEAD OF WORKING TO FORGE A UNIFIED POSITION THROUGH POLICY COMPROMISE.**

This clarity of focus has been welcomed by Australia and other US allies and partners in the region. Set against the Trump administration's failure to develop a coherent Indo-Pacific strategy that integrates military, economic and diplomatic lines of effort, these defence policy settings have provided a foundation for advancing important military cooperation, defence engagement and regional alliance coordination initiatives. Driven by effective political appointees and bureaucratic leaders within the Department of Defense, all of this is likely to continue in a second Trump administration.

If re-elected, Trump's "America First" agenda is sure to continue, along with its undesirable effect of undermining the allied and partner components of his administration's Indo-Pacific strategy.

"America First" has posed – and will continue to pose – two distinct problems for even long-standing, close US allies. First, the president's engrained hostility towards allies over burden-sharing concerns is likely to intensify, frustrating efforts to build a collective regional strategy. Not only is the White House souring alliance goodwill by pushing for a five-fold increase in host-country payments to keep 28,500 US troops stationed in South Korea and 54,000 in Japan; but its unilateral imposition of wide-ranging tariffs (on many countries) and sanctions (on China) is, directly and indirectly, harming the economic and industrial bases of allies and partners in the region. Second, the administration's increasingly confrontational approach towards China is alienating allies and partners instead of working to forge a unified position through policy compromise. This is particularly true in South-east Asia where the administration's zero-sum rhetoric on everything from technology competition and human rights to economic decoupling is creating rifts with many would-be balancers. While the Department of Defense will continue to tightrope around these obstacles, they impose hard limits to an effective regional strategy.

# US CIVILIAN-MILITARY RELATIONS

BY JIM GOLBY



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

President Biden would face the daunting task of re-establishing authority over America's most-respected institution, the U. military. Since September 11, 2001, the American public has consistently expressed more support for its military than for any other federal government organisation – and the military has, often subtly, used its prestige to consolidate substantial influence over military processes.

Although many prominent pundits have argued removing Trump would solve the central problem in American civil-military relations, a President Biden would nevertheless find significant challenges persist. The combination of deep political polarisation and high public confidence in the military has been drawing the American military into domestic politics in unhealthy ways for decades.

Although Trump has reportedly received mixed reviews from senior military officers, uniformed leaders will likely bristle when a familiar cast of civilian national security experts who served during the Obama administration again enter positions of power in the White House and the Pentagon. The military's power relative to civilian bureaucrats has been growing for years, but the hollowing out of the Pentagon bureaucracy during the entire Trump administration further cemented imbalances in military capacity and autonomy relative to its civilian overseers.

Warranted or not, senior military officers would likely cry micromanagement when a Biden administration returns determined to reassert civilian control over processes that oversee deployment decisions, war plans, and investment into programs that will shape the future of the US military. They could struggle with

administration policies and processes designed to re-establish transparency that eroded during four years of Trump. Military officers not used to a full bench of civilian political appointees and national security bureaucrats checking their work might feel constrained, but they would also be far more likely to receive the political guidance necessary to manage Pentagon processes in a more consistent manner.

**ALTHOUGH TRUMP HAS REPORTEDLY RECEIVED MIXED REVIEWS FROM SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS, UNIFORMED LEADERS WILL LIKELY BRISTLE WHEN A FAMILIAR CAST OF CIVILIAN NATIONAL SECURITY EXPERTS WHO SERVED DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AGAIN ENTER POSITIONS OF POWER IN THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE PENTAGON.**

At the same time, however, uniformed military leaders would remain squarely in the spotlight of America's polarised politics. Republican opponents of a Biden administration, in the Congress and in the media, would likely attempt to exacerbate real and perceived slights between civilian leaders in the Biden administration and senior military leaders. Moreover, the Trump-appointed military officers filling out the top ranks of the US military are likely to remain in their positions for at least the first two or three years of a Biden administration due to tradition and legal requirements. Biden may thus find his promise to keep the military out of partisan politics difficult to keep when he realises implementing his foreign policy agenda likely requires the informal acquiescence of uniformed officers at the Pentagon.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

Problems in American civil-military relations are usually more a symptom of domestic political dysfunction than a cause of it, but a second Trump term could turn that relationship on its head. While the incumbent president often is unpredictable, there is little doubt he would further blur the lines between civilian and military if granted another four years.

Donald Trump has never shown much respect for the norms of democratic civil-military relations. He has filled political positions in his administration with retired senior military officers, calling them “his generals” but casting them off as “democrats” or “Hillary-supporters” when they cross him publicly. Trump has actively courted military voters and he has interfered in court cases to pardon war criminals and as well as low-level military personnel decisions. President Trump has deployed the military domestically in controversial ways, in support of border enforcement operations immediately prior to the 2018 congressional elections, and he has threatened to do so again to quell domestic protests in response to police violence against African-Americans.

With no electoral incentives to curb his most extreme tendencies and real questions about whether Congress would have the political tools or will to push back, Trump is likely to further politicise the military. Soldiers are always a political tool of foreign policy, but four more years would give Trump additional time to attempt to transform the US military into a loyal, partisan actor.

During his first term, Trump set the stage for this transformation by hollowing out the civilian Pentagon bureaucracy and filling positions

with political loyalists or leaving key posts unoccupied. On the uniformed side, the president has already appointed nearly all the top generals and admirals in the US military. Four more years would likely change the incentive structure for mid-career and junior officers, potentially changing the character of the US military for years to come and creating long-term impacts on the institution.

These steps would grant Trump greater political control over the military institution that might allow him to better implement his controversial domestic and foreign policy agendas, but they also would lead to reduced professionalism and decreased competence of the force as political forces fracture units or competent soldiers and sailors decide to retire.

**FOUR MORE YEARS WOULD LIKELY CHANGE THE INCENTIVE STRUCTURE FOR MID-CAREER AND JUNIOR OFFICERS, POTENTIALLY CHANGING THE CHARACTER OF THE US MILITARY FOR YEARS TO COME AND CREATING LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON THE INSTITUTION.**

Nevertheless, norms of non-partisanship remain strong among America’s officer corps and principled resistance to partisan interference may persist. Even if it does, however, Trump has already shown he can count on paramilitary-style federal law enforcement organisations from the Department of Homeland Security to carry out controversial orders when senior military officers resist. In either case, civil-military relations under a second Trump administration could turn into a major American political problem.

# COVID-19 POLICY

BY ADAM KAMRADT-SCOTT



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Democratic Presidential Nominee and former Vice President Joe Biden has vowed to increase federal spending for health and has committed a Biden administration to take a stronger coordination role in the United States' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, both at home and abroad.

For example, on the domestic response, Biden has [previously publicly called](#) for utilisation of the Defense Production Act to increase manufacturing of personal protective equipment for frontline workers, increased funding for coronavirus testing, and widespread federally-supported contact tracing. In addition, a future Biden administration has [committed](#) to expanding the federal government response to combat the spread of the virus by ensuring free COVID-19 testing, creating mobile testing and drive-through testing sites, mobilising Department of Defense military medical resources and personnel to augment civilian efforts, establishing a public health corps to assist with contact tracing, and increased support for frontline healthcare workers. Beyond his [plans to expand eligibility](#) for more Americans to access the Affordable Care Act, Biden has [also pledged](#) to restore the White House National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense that was abolished by President Trump in 2018, and expand the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sentinel surveillance programs.

With respect to the United States' involvement in the international response to the pandemic, the former vice president has [pledged to immediately reverse](#) President Trump's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization if elected. A Biden administration has also [indicated](#) that it will work with allies to strengthen supply chains and manufacturing of critical equipment to circumvent reliance on Russia and China, while at the same time, [promising](#) to share COVID-19 vaccine technologies and ensure patents do not prohibit other countries' ability to access vaccines. A Biden administration has also [pledged](#) to create a Global Health Emergency Board to help coordinate the public health and economic recovery to the pandemic, a new United Nations Biological Events Facilitator to help synchronise the international health, security and humanitarian organisation response, and [reinvigorate](#) the Global Health Security Agenda initiative that was launched by the Obama-Biden administration.

**BIDEN HAS VOWED TO INCREASE FEDERAL SPENDING FOR HEALTH AND HAS COMMITTED A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION TO TAKE A STRONGER COORDINATION ROLE IN THE UNITED STATES' RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD.**



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

The COVID-19 pandemic has ensured health and healthcare will remain a critical election issue in November. This is not only due to the fact that the United States remains the worst-affected country with more than five million cases and one-quarter of the world's COVID-related fatalities, but also because the economic downturn led to widespread unemployment and commensurate loss of health insurance for many Americans.

**PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS PLEDGED TO DIVERT SPENDING FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION TO OTHER BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVES, HOWEVER, THIS PROPOSED RE-ALLOCATION OF US GLOBAL HEALTH SPENDING HAS YET TO BE OUTLINED.**

To date, the response of the Trump administration to COVID-19 pandemic has proven controversial, contributing to further divisions along partisan lines. The president has been heavily criticised for consistently downplaying the severity of the virus, for not providing federal assistance quickly enough, promoting unproven medical treatments like the use of hydroxychloroquine, inconsistent public health messaging, and for unhelpfully [politicising](#) the response by criticising states that implemented social distancing measures. Controversy has also surrounded the Trump administration's decision [to sideline](#) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) following a public disagreement between CDC director Robert Redfield and the president in April. This impression has been further rein-

forced following the administration's decision to seek to remove funding for the CDC and coronavirus testing and to transfer responsibility for COVID-19 data collection, management and disclosure from the CDC to the Department of Health and Human Services, which has [contributed to confusion](#) at the local district level.

In addition, after previously threatening to withdraw from the World Health Organization over unsubstantiated claims the organisation is unduly influenced by the People's Republic of China, in July President Trump formally notified the United Nations Secretary-General of his intention to withdraw the United States from the global health agency. In the event President Trump is re-elected in November, this withdrawal is scheduled to occur in July 2021 unless reversed. President Trump has pledged to divert spending from the World Health Organization to other bilateral and multilateral global health initiatives, however, this proposed re-allocation of US global health spending has yet to be outlined.

Noting the above, there have been some indications the Trump administration may be adjusting its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, while for months the president refused to wear face masks suggesting they were unnecessary, in mid-July he appeared in public wearing a mask and has even recently [suggested wearing face masks is patriotic](#). In addition, testing for the coronavirus has [increased in July](#) to approximately 744,000 tests per day (up from 508,000 per day in June), and has cancelled political rallies that might serve to further disseminate the virus.



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Former Vice President [Joe Biden's campaign website](#) has a wealth of policies and position statements on a range of issues. He would come to the presidency burdened with enormous voter expectations that he will improve access to healthcare and address the Trump administration failures on the coronavirus pandemic quickly and equitably.

**BIDEN WOULD COME TO THE PRESIDENCY BURDENED WITH ENORMOUS VOTER EXPECTATIONS THAT HE WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND ADDRESS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FAILURES ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC QUICKLY AND EQUITABLY.**

Biden has vowed to [boost the Affordable Care Act](#) (ACA), also known as Obamacare. His proposed plan would cost [US\\$750 billion over ten years](#), financed by increased taxes on the wealthy. He does not support a single-payer system like Medicare-for-all but has called for a [Medicare-like public alternative](#) to private insurance. He also proposes lowering the [Medicare eligibility age](#) from 65 to 60, potentially extending Medicare to some 20 million more Americans. Currently, it seems Biden has satisfied the [demands](#) of those Democrats who have pushed for universal healthcare; it is unclear if this détente will last once he is elected.

Biden has a [substantive plan](#) to tackle the pandemic both nationally and internationally. It includes free testing, the elimination of cost barriers to prevention and treatment, and marshalling a wide array of federal resources. He has clearly [taken advice from experts](#) and enlisted their support; nevertheless, he will face a tough challenge rebuilding trust and undoing the damage President Trump has wrought.

On women's issues, Biden's [support for Roe v Wade](#) and his recently [reversed position](#) on the Hyde Amendment has led to his [endorsement by Planned Parenthood](#).

In support of issues which affect health inequalities, Biden has developed policies in areas such as [climate change](#), [gun control](#), and [low-income housing](#). He has announced a [specific plan](#) to address the social determinants of health for seniors and the disabled. And notably, there is a [series of statements](#) on his website about his agenda for working with racial minorities to improve their socio-economic status.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

While a [June survey](#) showed that affordability of healthcare and the coronavirus outbreak ranked as key issues for all voters, well ahead of crime, terrorism and illegal immigration, there are currently no policies to be found on the [Trump campaign website](#) in regards to healthcare. His second term election policies must be inferred from his public statements, tweets and executive orders.

Trump has used executive power and the courts to [attack and undermine the ACA](#) and has proposed a series of [harmful changes to Medicaid](#). As a consequence, the number of people without health insurance has [increased under his watch](#) and is [rising precipitously](#) due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite this, the Trump administration has joined Republican-led states in asking the US Supreme Court to [strike down the ACA](#). This would eliminate health coverage for some [23 million Americans](#) and affect the scope and quality of [virtually everyone's](#) healthcare. Yet, notwithstanding [repeated promises](#), Trump has failed to deliver a better, less costly alternative to the ACA.

Irrespective of its findings, the Supreme Court decision on the ACA case (which is not expected until 2021), will almost certainly force Trump in his second term to finally put some alternative plan to Congress. However, even if a second Trump term coincides with a Republican Senate, its enactment must be considered uncertain.

A key second-term issue is how Trump will address the ongoing consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. On [21 July](#), Trump said that his administration is “in the process of developing a strategy” to combat the pandemic – that

has yet to be seen. Current indications are that unless [vaccines or effective therapeutics](#) are developed so Trump can play political favourites with distributing this largesse, his focus will be on [economic](#) rather than health impacts.

A second Trump term will continue to threaten women's health issues in several ways. Trump has attempted to limit women's access to abortion at home and overseas by [expanding “gag rules”](#) on family planning organisations in the United States and overseas groups receiving US assistance. Women's access to pre- and post-natal care and contraception would be [adversely impacted](#) by repeal of the ACA. And President Trump's ability to appoint new judges to the US Supreme Court would [threaten \*Roe v Wade\*](#), which underpins abortion rights.

**WHILE A JUNE SURVEY SHOWED THAT AFFORDABILITY OF HEALTHCARE AND THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK RANKED AS KEY ISSUES FOR ALL VOTERS, WELL AHEAD OF CRIME, TERRORISM AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, THERE ARE CURRENTLY NO POLICIES TO BE FOUND ON THE TRUMP CAMPAIGN WEBSITE IN REGARDS TO HEALTHCARE.**

Good health is about more than access to healthcare and the Trump administration has made numerous attempts to cut the [food stamps program](#), [low-income assistance programs](#) and other programs that improve the [social determinants of health](#), and to roll back [human and civil rights programs](#). Such actions would continue in his second term.

# POLICE AND PROTEST

BY ELLIOTT BRENNAN



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

In light of the Black Lives Matter protests, former Vice President Joe Biden was quick to [state clearly](#) he doesn't support defunding the police. Indeed, the [Biden platform](#) includes a US\$300 million investment in the police.

Biden has a long record of support community policing and this would be a focus of his administration's attempts at reform. Community policing, [in Biden's words](#), is about police building "relationships with the people and the communities they are there to serve and protect." It was a key recommendation in Obama's [President's Taskforce on 21st Century Policing](#) following the Ferguson protests which spawned the Black Lives Matter movement in 2014.

**A BIDEN WIN AND A DISPUTED ELECTION RESULT COULD LEAD TO A BACKLASH PROTEST MOVEMENT, NOT DISSIMILAR TO THE #RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN 2017. THE DIFFERENCE IN 2021 WILL BE HOW AN EMBOLDENED AND CONSPIRACY-THEORY-DRIVEN FAR-RIGHT WING WOULD FIGURE IN THEM.**

Community policing is disputed as an effective approach to policing and it is distinctly not what protesters are now calling for now. Broadly, they would like to see investment going towards replacing police with social workers in cases which demand them. This would likely be a point of tension between a President Biden and the [more progressive lawmakers his win could usher into Congress](#).

Where Biden's stated platform does align with the thrust of the protest movement include promises to decriminalise (though [not legalise](#)) the recreational use of cannabis, expunging all prior cannabis-use sentences and granting clemency to individuals facing long sentences for non-violent and drug-related crimes. He says he will act to remove measures which are argued to punish poverty like the cash bail system and prison as a punitive measure for the failure to pay fees.

Biden's platform also includes a [mea-culpa](#): a promise to overturn mandatory minimum sentences and the distinction in law between crack and powder cocaine – both policies he championed as a senator which have greatly contributed to disproportionate Black incarceration. Many of these policies would be contingent on a Democratic majority in the Senate.

A Biden win and a disputed election result could lead to a backlash protest movement, not dissimilar to the [#Resistance](#) movement in 2017. The difference in 2021 – and a challenge for [Australia](#) and the [world](#) – will be how an emboldened and [conspiracy-theory-driven](#) far-right wing would figure in them. As it stands, the only policy the Biden campaign has nominated formally in this regard is "moral leadership." The problem could demand much more than this and an early Biden 2021 approach to it will set a global precedent.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

President Trump [described](#) the death of George Floyd as a “terrible thing.” Following this, he signed an executive order which encouraged chokeholds to be banned in policing but equivocated on whether they might sometimes be necessary. Since this brief openness to reform, the White House now appears to want to strengthen the powers of police in the United States, building on the status quo using the pretence of the [largest protest movement](#) in modern American history.

President Trump has taken to describing himself as the “[president of law and order](#),” a reference to the famous [Nixon-era slogan](#). To account for how such a state of disorder arose in the United States under his administration, the president says it is down to “soft on crime Democrats” – another Nixon era legacy – who serve as governors of predominantly red states and mayors of urban centres.

This rhetoric and the lack of stated policy to back it up will have a politicising effect on the nation’s [more than 15,000 distinct police departments](#).

Police unions in the United States were already a potent political force ([often with the support of Democrats](#)) and have been a [difficult obstacle](#) to reform. Mayors [complain](#) they can clearly see where “bad apples” exist in the system but are left powerless to remove them by staunch unions.

Police force representatives have proven willing to contribute politically in 2020. Indeed, the president recently held a press conference in Florida [backed by sheriffs](#) who presented a list of 48 of the state’s 67 county sheriffs endorsing a Trump re-election. Additionally, it seems more than 100 police agencies will [renege on an agreement](#) to staff the Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee due to a city directive banning the use of tear gas.

Even where city directives have been implemented, the Department of Justice helmed by Attorney General William Barr [seems to be aggressively probing the legal extent of its unilateral powers](#). Agents from various federal departments have been deployed on policing missions in Democratic-run cities, extrapolating the argument of President Trump. These federal agents have often undermined the peace and have given new momentum to protests. These agencies have also drawn on the use of [remarkable surveillance powers](#), typically reserved for border patrols and overseas warfare.

**UNDER A SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION, THE LOCAL POLICING POWERS BEING EXHIBITED BY FEDERAL AGENCIES COULD BECOME ENTRENCHED AND THE POLITICAL DIVIDE BETWEEN ELECTORAL DISTRICTS AND THE NATION’S POLICE FORCES WILL LIKELY WIDEN.**

Under a second Trump administration, the local policing powers being exhibited by federal agencies could become entrenched and the political divide between electoral districts and the nation’s police forces will likely widen. This would stymie grassroots attempts at substantive reform.

Without genuine police reform, perpetual force and volatility will be added to what has already proven to be a resilient protest movement.

Regardless of the outcome in November, Australia should brace for a monumental surge in American protest activity between the election and early 2021.

# ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

BY BRENDON O'CONNOR



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

During the Democratic primaries, it was common to hear candidates talk of the United States and the world facing an “existential threat.” This did not mean the ideas of French philosophers John Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir had taken hold, it meant the existence of the natural environment and, therefore, life on earth was under threat.

Since September 11, 2001, Republicans have regularly talked about terrorism as an “existential threat” to Americans, now Democrats are commonly using this alarmist language. In the case of global warming, this alarm seems justified, particularly in the face of presidential denial and inaction. However, what difference could a Biden administration realistically make on climate change?

This depends on which version of Joe Biden will govern if elected president. Will it be moderate ([more “bipartisan” Senator Biden](#)) who wants to return the United States to normalcy or will it be fightin’ Joe who is emboldened by the progressive wing of the Democratic party. Furthermore, achieving serious reform on climate change will require a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate (where they would need to get rid of the [filibuster](#) unless they can claim a stunning super majority of 60 out of 100 Senate seats as a result of this year’s election).

Over the course of 2020, Biden’s campaign policy announcements on the environment have become bolder. His latest plan aims to end

carbon emissions from power plants by 2035 and promote a green federal investment plan that would see US\$2 trillion spent on renewable energy projects over a 10-year period. And it sets a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The detailed plans to reverse global warming [outlined on Biden’s 2020 website](#), stand in marked contrast to Trump’s 2020 election website, which [boasts of getting rid of Obama’s environmental regulations and policies](#).

### **BIDEN’S LATEST PLAN AIMS TO END CARBON EMISSIONS FROM POWER PLANTS BY 2035 AND PROMOTE A GREEN FEDERAL INVESTMENT PLAN THAT WOULD SEE US\$2 TRILLION SPENT ON RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS OVER A 10-YEAR PERIOD.**

Biden’s environmental proposals are still well short of what leading progressive Democrats have called for. The [Green New Deal, which Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) has championed, has set the target of net-zero carbon emissions in the United States by 2030. Bernie Sanders in this 2020 campaign had a timeline that embraced the New Deal targets but realised it might take longer to achieve this goal. What was striking about Sanders’ proposal was a plan to spend [US\\$16.3 trillion on 20 million jobs, and green infrastructure and investment](#) to transition the United States to a green economy. That is how to address an existential threat. Only time will tell how bold Biden (if elected) will really be.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

There are many reasons to worry about the consequences of four more years of the Trump administration. My gravest concern is the impact a re-elected President Trump would have on the development of rational and essential policies to address climate change.

The fact that objective science on climate change, and now on COVID-19, has been [labelled “left-wing”](#) is a damning indictment of how divorced from facts the Trump administration is. The [scientific evidence is overwhelming](#) that the earth is warming at a dangerous rate and, in response, strong American leadership is required to help slow down global warming. The United States needs to lead by both example in its domestic policies and through active engagement in international organisations.

**THE UNITED STATES, THE WORLD AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT NEED A PRESIDENT WHO IS WILLING TO ACT ON REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS AND IS NOT OBSESSED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS.**

President Trump seems incapable of providing this leadership. The principal reasons are twofold. Firstly, Trump campaigned and then has governed as a zero-sum nationalist. This America first and foremost approach to climate change has brought about a [reversal of the modest progress made during the Obama presidency](#).

Secondly, President Obama often stated that one of his guiding principles of leadership was “don’t do stupid things,” however, this requires an attention to detail that President Trump has yet to display the patience or personality to achieve.

Addressing climate change effectively requires a strong sense of selflessness to act for future generations. It has been described as the worst possible problem for our [short-sighted political systems](#) and instant gratification culture.

One hundred years ago, Max Weber wrote that “Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards”: meaning it [requires hard work and persistence](#). And [he warned the vain](#) should not be elected because in power they are “constantly in danger of becoming an actor as well as taking lightly the responsibility for the outcome of his actions and of being concerned merely with the ‘impression’ he makes.” The United States, the world and the global environment need a president who is willing to act on reducing carbon emissions and is not obsessed with social media impressions.



## A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

If Joe Biden wins the presidency this year, much of pop culture will continue as it would if Trump won.

There may be an intensification of pop culture as a site for the contestation of symbolic power, because a Biden victory means a Trump loss. Questions of legitimacy and channels of protest will see those sections and fields of pop culture that are affected by presidential and partisan politics use the cultural and social capital they hold to make the case for their “side.” Celebrities – from traditional to micro – will be quoted and amplified across online and legacy media. Conservative media, from the mainstream of FOX News to the fringe of QAnon message boards, will traffic in hyperbole and accusation (much like liberal media, from the mainstream of MSNBC to the online #resistance against Trump trafficked in Russiagate).

**WHETHER THIS IS RUSSIAGATE OR THE QANON MUSINGS CENTRED AROUND HUMAN SEX TRAFFICKING, THE INTERNET HAS ENABLED CONSPIRACY THEORIES, MUCH LIKE TRUMP’S MODE OF POLITICS, TO FUNCTION AS POP CULTURE. A BIDEN VICTORY SEEMS UNLIKELY TO QUELL THIS TURN.**

If the promises Biden made during the Democratic primaries are realised – broadly that things will go back to how they were before, where one doesn’t have to think about what the American president will say or do every day – we can expect pop culture to track in a few ways. Celebrities, and comedians in particular, may retreat from their self-appointed roles as advocates for institutional integrity and sober leadership. Cultural production will continue the mainstreaming of diversity in representation, which is at once an earnest attempt to make visible historically repressed and overlooked groups of people and a grasp at holding on to increasingly fragmented audiences that can easily find what they want to consume outside the traditional sites and channels of pop culture.

But the Trump presidency may cast a long shadow over a Biden victory. For example, conspiracy theory has enjoyed a revival since earlier heydays involving aliens in the 1990s and the Satanic Panic of the 1980s. Whether this is Russiagate or the QAnon musings centred around human sex trafficking, the internet has enabled conspiracy theories, much like Trump’s mode of politics, to function as pop culture. A Biden victory seems unlikely to quell this turn.



## A SECOND TRUMP TERM

If Donald Trump wins a second term as president, much of pop culture will continue as it has for the last decade: niche audiences, powered by networked connectivity, will form sizeable, self-sustaining subcultures. Traditional media will be less central, and tied more closely with social and new media. Breakout successes, like the Netflix series *Tiger King*, free access multiplayer videogame Fortnite or even the country/rap megahit “Old Town Road,” will have immediate, and sometimes lasting impact, cutting across the splintered and diverse American and global culture industries.

**FOR THOSE LARGE SWATHES OF POP CULTURE WHICH ARE AFFECTED BY PRESIDENTIAL AND PARTISAN POLITICS, A SECOND TRUMP VICTORY WILL SEE POP CULTURE CONTINUE AS A SITE FOR THE CONTESTATION OF SYMBOLIC POWER.**

For those large swathes of pop culture which are affected by presidential and partisan politics, a second Trump victory will see pop culture continue as a site for the contestation of symbolic power. Pop culture can be produced and consumed outside this narrow conception of politics. The gap between symbolic power and political power – who gets healthcare, who is imprisoned, who wins and loses at the hands of the state – will widen.

For example, the anti-racist protests that were triggered by the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers saw blanket traditional, new, and social media coverage, widespread support by celebrities ranging from YouTubers like Logan Paul to music icons like Taylor Swift and Beyoncé, and hundreds of companies and brands issuing social media content that (after a few days of internal meetings) demonstrated which side they were on. Having this play out in the sphere of culture, however, saw this energy and support routed into a question around Confederate monuments. The political power necessary to, for example, reform a police department, cannot be exercised symbolically.

A significant and unique aspect will be the continuing outsized role that the president will play. Trump is very good for the business of media culture. Social media will flame, and cable and online news coverage will be breathless and rolling, in response to the president’s posts and soundbites (But this will likely also happen for ex-President Trump). Trump is the central protagonist about which conservative and liberal media can organise their output.

Australia will continue to take its cues from the United States. The furore around statues of Captain Cook and Governor Macquarie, the quarrels of historical questions of slavery and [blackbirding](#) and the strange entanglement of wearing a face mask and a hysterical notion of freedom that sounds decidedly American.

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