

## Biden to Face Realities Domestic and Foreign

Su Chi

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It was difficult enough for Joe Biden to come to power in the United States. His days in the White House are likely to be even more strenuous, because he is about to take over a nation bedeviled by serious pandemic, divided society, wide wealth gap, and declining dominance on the world stage. Hence **President Biden will likely focus more on domestic matters than on foreign affairs, and place internal issues before external relations.**

**His first challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic.** When Biden appointed Lloyd Austin as his secretary of defense, who would be the first African-American to lead the Pentagon, he gave several reasons why he made the choice. The first was based on Austin's successful experience overseeing the withdrawal of 150,000 troops from Iraq ten years earlier. And he is needed now to "immediately quarterback an enormous logistics operation to help distribute COVID-19 vaccines widely and equitably." The second was to "ensure the well-being and resilience of our service members and their families strained by almost two decades of war." The third was to "reflect and promote the full diversity of our nation." The last was to "defend the American people." Biden's order of priority could not be clearer.

**The second challenge is social and political divisions in the U.S. today highlighted by Trump's voting strength, despite his defeat, coupled with the recent storming of the Capitol, unprecedented in two centuries.** To complicate matters further, the Democratic Party is a lot more diversified than the Republic Party. The main reason that Biden broke out in the primaries was that he is like a "big tent" where anyone could find a niche inside. After he enters the White House however, the struggle for powers and interests within the Democratic Party is bound to resurface. It will be a tough challenge for Biden to balance within his own party, while at the same time, competing

and compromising with the Republican Party.

**The third challenge is the widening gap between the rich and poor.** Today the total assets of the top 50 wealthiest individuals in the United States were equal to the wealth of half of the American populace. The largest 500 companies paid only 11 percent in taxes on average. Ninety one companies among them, such as Amazon, Starbucks, and Netflix, actually paid "zero or less than zero" in taxes. Except for a few Democratic Senators, no politician from either party dares to challenge those billionaires and the big companies. They could only vent and channel the anger of the poor masses onto the foreign countries such as China and Mexico.

For President Biden, this decade-long chronic disease plaguing the United States is suddenly mutated into an acute disease characterized by three symptoms with dire consequences. **First, it nourishes the soil for Trump's populism.** If nothing is done, a new version of Donald Trump is bound to pop up somewhere. **Second, in order to strengthen its slim majority, the Democratic Party must win back the working class,** who has stood with the Democratic Party decades earlier but is now die-hard supporters of President Trump. Only through income redistribution is it possible to win back their hearts and minds. **Third, the spread of the coronavirus does not distinguish between the rich and poor.** So long as there are large numbers of poor people who must work outside of their residences and come into contact with others, and/or those who are unwilling to seek medical care due to lack of insurance or savings, it will be rather difficult to combat the pandemic to the fullest extent in the United States. However, to close the wealth gap, Biden has to challenge too many vested interests, which is by no means easy.

On external relations, President Biden's most critical problem, also vital to Taiwan, is the steady decline of American military prowess. At the height of U.S. military power in the 1960s, it was built on the principle of winning "two and a half wars" (one against the Soviet Union, the other against the Communist China or North Korea, and half against the Third World). In the 1970s and 1980s, it was changed to "one and a half wars." During the presidency of George W. Bush, it was changed to "two major regional wars" (one against the Middle East, and the other against North Korea). It was only in 2018 that the Pentagon started to think seriously about shifting to a duel between "peer

competitors" against China or Russia. Hence U.S. armament, deployment, and training today are still oriented toward regional counter-terrorism operations. China's People Liberation Army, on the other hand, has been training hard for 20 years for exactly the possible confrontation with its "peer competitor," other than enjoying a home-court advantage. The U.S. military is thus placed at distinct disadvantage.

Some people in Taiwan content themselves with superficial expressions of America's "willingness to protect Taiwan," woefully oblivious to the cruel reality of its dwindling capability to do so. In recent years, the present writer has pored over nearly all the relevant studies in the United States and asked as many American officials, former officials, and experts as possible but has yet to find a single book, article, or person expressing confidence in "safeguarding Taiwan". It is no wonder that the Trump administration has been merrily playing with "Taiwan card" for four years, but when it came to critical moment or project, it always slammed on the brakes.

In light of this, President Tsai Ing-wen's administration, with the United States as its only patron, is well advised to exercise extra caution in the future. **Even with its vigilance towards Beijing, the Biden administration must first take care of American health, national unity and economy before it can map out responses to external challenges.** The Tsai administration must not continue to engage in wishful thinking and put Taiwan in grave danger.

*The author, chairman of the Taipei Forum, formerly served as secretary-general of the National Security Council, Republic of China (Taiwan), from 2008 to 2010.*