

Eisenhower's Ghost Haunts Biden's Foreign Policy Team

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Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [History](#)

In his first words as President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for Secretary of State, [Antony Blinken](#) said, "we have to proceed with equal measures of humility and confidence." Many around the world will welcome this promise of humility from the new administration, and Americans should too.

Biden's foreign policy team will also need a special kind of confidence to confront the most serious challenge they face. That will not be a threat from a hostile foreign country, but the controlling and corrupting power of the [Military-Industrial Complex](#), which President Eisenhower warned our grandparents about 60 years ago, but whose "unwarranted influence" has only grown ever since, as Eisenhower warned, and in spite of his warning.

The Covid pandemic is a tragic demonstration of why America's new leaders should listen humbly to our neighbors around the world instead of trying to reassert American "leadership." While the United States compromised with a deadly virus to protect corporate financial interests, abandoning Americans to both the pandemic and its economic effects, [other countries](#) put their people's health first and contained, controlled or even eliminated the virus.

Many of those people have since returned to living normal, healthy lives. Biden and Blinken should listen humbly to their leaders and learn from them, instead of continuing to promote the U.S. [neoliberal model](#) that is failing us so badly.

As efforts to develop safe and effective vaccines begin to bear fruit, America is doubling down on its mistakes, relying on Big Pharma to produce expensive, profitable vaccines on an America First basis, even as China, Russia, the WHO's Covax program and others are already starting to provide [low-cost vaccines](#) wherever they are needed around the world.

Chinese vaccines are already in use in Indonesia, Malaysia and the UAE, and China is making loans to poorer countries that can't afford to pay for them up front. At the recent G20 summit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned her Western colleagues that they are being eclipsed by China's vaccine diplomacy.

Russia has orders from 50 countries for 1.2 billion doses of its Sputnik V vaccine. President Putin told the G20 that vaccines should be "common public assets," universally available to rich and poor countries alike, and that Russia will provide them wherever they are needed.

The U.K. and Sweden's Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccine is another non-profit

venture that will cost about \$3 per dose, a small fraction of the U.S.'s Pfizer and Moderna products.

From the beginning of the pandemic, it was predictable that U.S. failures and other countries' successes would reshape [global leadership](#). When the world finally recovers from this pandemic, people around the world will thank China, Russia, Cuba and other countries for saving their lives and helping them in their hour of need.

The Biden administration must also help our neighbors to defeat the pandemic, and it must do better than Trump and his corporate mafia in that respect, but it is already too late to speak of American leadership in this context.

The neoliberal roots of U.S. bad behavior

Decades of U.S. bad behavior in other areas have already led to a [broader decline](#) in American global leadership. The U.S. refusal to join the Kyoto Protocol or any binding agreement on climate change has led to an otherwise avoidable existential crisis for the entire human race, even as the United States is still producing record amounts [of oil](#) and [natural gas](#). Biden's climate czar John Kerry now says that the agreement he negotiated in Paris as Secretary of State "is not enough," but he has only himself and Obama to blame for that.

Obama's policy was to boost fracked natural gas as a "[bridge fuel](#)" for U.S. power plants, and to quash any possibility of a binding [climate treaty](#) in Copenhagen or Paris. U.S. climate policy, like the U.S. response to Covid, is a corrupt compromise between science and self-serving corporate interests that has predictably proved to be no solution at all. If Biden and Kerry bring more of that kind of American leadership to the Glasgow climate conference in 2021, humanity must reject it as a matter of survival.

America's post-9/11 "Global War on Terror," more accurately a "global war of terror," has fueled war, chaos and terrorism across the world. The absurd notion that widespread U.S. military violence could somehow put an end to terrorism quickly devolved into a cynical pretext for "regime change" wars against any country that resisted the imperial dictates of the wannabe "superpower."



Secretary of State Colin Powell privately dubbed his colleagues the "[fucking crazies](#)," even as [he lied](#) to the UN Security Council and the world to advance their plans for [illegal aggression](#) against Iraq. Joe Biden's [critical role](#) as Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee was to orchestrate hearings that promoted their lies and excluded dissident voices who would have challenged them.

The resulting spiral of violence has killed [millions of people](#), from [7,037 American troop](#) deaths to five [assassinations](#) of Iranian scientists (under Obama and now Trump). Most of the victims have been either [innocent civilians](#) or people just trying to [defend themselves](#), their families or their countries from foreign invaders, [U.S.-trained death squads](#) or actual [CIA-backed terrorists](#).

Former Nuremberg prosecutor Ben Ferencz [told NPR](#) only a week after the crimes of September 11th, “It can never be legitimate to punish people who are not responsible for the wrong done. We must make a distinction between punishing the guilty and punishing others.” Neither Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Pakistan, Palestine, Libya, Syria or Yemen was responsible for the crimes of September 11th, and yet U.S. and allied armed forces have filled miles upon miles of graveyards with the bodies of their innocent people.

Like the Covid pandemic and the climate crisis, the unimaginable horror of the “war on terror” is another calamitous case of corrupt U.S. policy-making leading to massive loss of life. The vested interests that dictate and pervert U.S. policy, in particular the supremely powerful Military-Industrial Complex, marginalized the inconvenient truths that none of these countries had attacked or even threatened to attack the United States, and that U.S. and allied attacks on them violated the most fundamental principles of international law.

If Biden and his team genuinely aspire for the United States to play a leading and constructive role in the world, they must find a way to turn the page on this ugly episode in the already [bloody history](#) of American foreign policy. Matt Duss, an advisor to Senator Bernie Sanders, has called for a [formal commission](#) to investigate how U.S. policymakers so deliberately and systematically violated and undermined the “rules-based international order” that their grandparents so carefully and wisely built after two world wars that killed a hundred million people.

Others have observed that the remedy provided for by that rules-based order would be to prosecute senior U.S. officials. That would probably include Biden and some of his team. Ben Ferencz has noted that the U.S. case for “preemptive” war is the same argument that the German defendants used to justify their crimes of aggression at Nuremberg.

“That argument was considered by three American judges at Nuremberg,” [Ferencz explained](#), “and they sentenced Ohlendorf and twelve others to death by hanging. So it’s very disappointing to find that my government today is prepared to do something for which we hanged Germans as war criminals.”

Time to Break the Cross of Iron

Another critical problem facing the Biden team is the deterioration of U.S. relations with China and Russia. Both countries’ military forces are primarily defensive, and therefore cost a [small fraction](#) of what the U.S. spends on its global war machine – 9% in the case of Russia, and 36% for China. Russia, of all countries, has sound historical

reasons to maintain strong defenses, and does so very cost-effectively.

As former President [Carter reminded Trump](#), China has not been at war since a brief border war with Vietnam in 1979, and has instead focused on economic development and lifted 800 million people out of poverty, while the U.S. has been squandering its wealth on its lost wars. Is it any wonder that China's economy is now healthier and more dynamic than ours?

For the United States to blame Russia and China for America's unprecedented military spending and global militarism is a cynical reversal of cause and effect – as much of a nonsense and an injustice as using the crimes of September 11th as a pretext to attack countries and kill people who had nothing to do with the crimes committed.

So here too, Biden's team face a stark choice between a policy based on objective reality and a deceptive one driven by the capture of U.S. policy by corrupt interests, in this case the most powerful of them all, Eisenhower's infamous [Military-Industrial Complex](#). Biden's officials have spent their careers in a hall of mirrors and revolving doors that conflates and confuses defense with corrupt, self-serving militarism, but our future now depends on rescuing our country from that deal with the devil.

As the saying goes, the only tool the U.S. has invested in is a hammer, so every problem looks like a nail. The U.S. response to every dispute with another country is an expensive new weapons system, another U.S. military intervention, a coup, a covert operation, a proxy war, tighter sanctions or some other form of coercion, all based on the supposed power of the U.S. to impose its will on other countries, but all increasingly ineffective, destructive and impossible to undo once unleashed.

This has led to war without end in Afghanistan and Iraq; it has left Haiti, Honduras and Ukraine destabilized and mired in poverty as the result of U.S.-backed coups; it has destroyed Libya, Syria and Yemen with covert and proxy wars and resulting humanitarian crises; and to [U.S. sanctions](#) that affect a [third of humanity](#).

So the first question for the first meeting of Biden's foreign policy team should be whether they can sever [their loyalties](#) to the arms manufacturers, corporate-funded think tanks, lobbying and consultant firms, government contractors and corporations they have worked for or partnered with during their careers.

These conflicts of interest amount to a sickness at the roots of the most serious problems facing America and the world, and they will not be resolved without a clean break. Any member of Biden's team who cannot make that commitment and mean it should resign now, before they do any more damage.

Long before his farewell speech in 1961, President Eisenhower made [another speech](#), responding to the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. He said, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed...This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

In his first year in office, Eisenhower ended the Korean War and cut [military](#)

[spending](#) by 39% from its wartime peak. Then he resisted pressures to raise it again, despite his failure to end the Cold War.

Today, the Military-Industrial Complex is counting on a reversion to the Cold War against Russia and China as the key to its future [power and profits](#), to keep us hanging from this rusty old cross of iron, squandering America's wealth on trillion-dollar weapons programs as people go hungry, millions of Americans have no healthcare and our climate becomes unlivable.

Are Joe Biden, Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan the kind of leaders to just say "No" to the Military-Industrial Complex and consign this cross of iron to the junkyard of history, where it belongs? We will find out very soon.

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