

Biden losing friends and gaining enemies

Biden's unforced errors are killing America in the grand geopolitical game of the 21st century.



US President Joe Biden speaks about foreign policy at the State Department in Washington on February 4, 2021. Photo: AFP / Saul Loeb

US President Joseph R Biden rose to power promising to restore America's purportedly ailing alliances. Allies are needed to assist the United States in curbing the rise of China, Russian aggression, and Iranian revanchism. Yet in the last several weeks, the Biden administration has gone out of its way to alienate potential allies across the world.

Slapping India while asking for its hand

China is expanding its reach into every part of Eurasia, doing its best to muscle out the United States.

American leaders from both political parties have fantasized about creating an “Asian NATO” known as the Quadrilateral Alliance (or simply “the Quad”). Japan, Australia, India, and the United States are to be the basis of the alliance, which is predicated on containing China’s rise and forcing Beijing to adhere to the “rules-based international order.”

India previously resisted American calls to form the Quad, but after China launched an unprovoked incursion on its border last year, India began looking more favorably upon the alliance.

One reason India initially resisted the Quad was New Delhi’s fierce commitment to national independence. Indian leaders have never wanted to become too dependent on any foreign nation for national security. This is an understandable outgrowth of India’s centuries-long experience as a colony of the British Empire.

So while India has striven to move closer to America’s powerful orbit in the Indo-Pacific region, its leaders have also maintained friendly relations with another American rival in Eurasia, Russia. India wants to purchase Russian-built S-400 air defense systems. Washington fears that doing so would prevent the kind of technology sharing that has enabled the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to maintain its edge.

A row between the leaders of India and the United States occurred in March, when the Biden administration reportedly threatened to impose sanctions on India if it went ahead with the purchase of the Russian air defense system. Fortunately, Washington walked back its threat. But the damage was likely already done.

Meanwhile, India seeks to compete with China for power in the aptly named Indian Ocean. China seeks to expand its reach to its west – linking up Chinese power in the Pacific with Chinese interests in Africa. India rightly has a problem with this and is countering Chinese territorial claims with its own.

To any rational thinker in the United States, these bold Indian moves should be encouraged. What’s good for China’s goose should be, after all, good for the gander in the Indo-Pacific region. Yet the Biden administration ordered an aggressive freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) to be conducted not against its Chinese rivals in the region but against its would-be ally, India.

New Delhi will be constantly looking over its geopolitical shoulder, wondering if the Americans are reliable as partners in the long run (we're not, sadly).

With friends like these, right?

Without India in America's corner in the Indo-Pacific region, the already daunting task of containing China's rise will be made nearly impossible. Hectoring and embarrassing potential allies is counterproductive.

Poking allies, though, has become a hallmark of the Biden administration. Former president Donald Trump's insults were mostly superficial. Biden's appear to be pointed - and lasting.

Biden throws Israel under the bus

A recorded conversation between Biden administration representative (and former secretary of state under Barack Obama) John Kerry shared classified intelligence about Israeli military operations in Syria that were being directed against Iranian assets there with Iran's ambassador to the United Nations.

This is all part of the ill-conceived Biden administration reset with Iran ... which, as it turns out, involves Washington throwing its long-term allies in the Middle East, notably democratic Israel but also the Sunni Arab states, under the bus. The US-Israel intelligence-sharing alliance is a key advantage in America's overall Global War on Terror. Kerry's actions may have just undercut that relationship.

Trampling Turkey

The Biden administration has completely botched America's already dying relationship with Turkey by declaring that the Turks did, in fact, commit the Armenian genocide during the First World War. By publicly recognizing what clearly was one of the gravest human-rights abuses of the 20th century, President Biden has put Turkey's Islamist leader, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on the defensive.

Turkey is a NATO ally. Losing Turkey, which is a real possibility after years of neglect and mismanagement by successive American administrations, would increase instability in the Middle East and Europe.

Further, alienating Turkey would empower Russia, China, and Iran - all three of which Turkey has been cozying up to over the last decade. While the Armenian

genocide was grotesque, acknowledging it in such a public manner at this time was foolish on Biden's part.

As a Sunni Muslim state, Turkey could prove essential in helping to contain Shiite Iran in the Middle East. Turkey could also be used to balance against Russia's rise. These prospects are now unlikely. What's more likely is that Turkey will chart a separate course from NATO and the United States. In so doing, Ankara will help China, Russia, and Iran solidify a Eurasian alliance of anti-American autocrats while weakening the Western alliance.

Biden's shambolic actions have helped to empower the very same anti-American autocrats in Eurasia it seeks to contain. Today, America is defending its position atop the international system. Thus, as defender, Washington has to play the game right almost all of the time. America's foes, however, only have to get things right one time.

Biden's unforced errors are killing America in the grand geopolitical game of the 21st century. Let's hope Biden can recover from his mistakes fast.

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