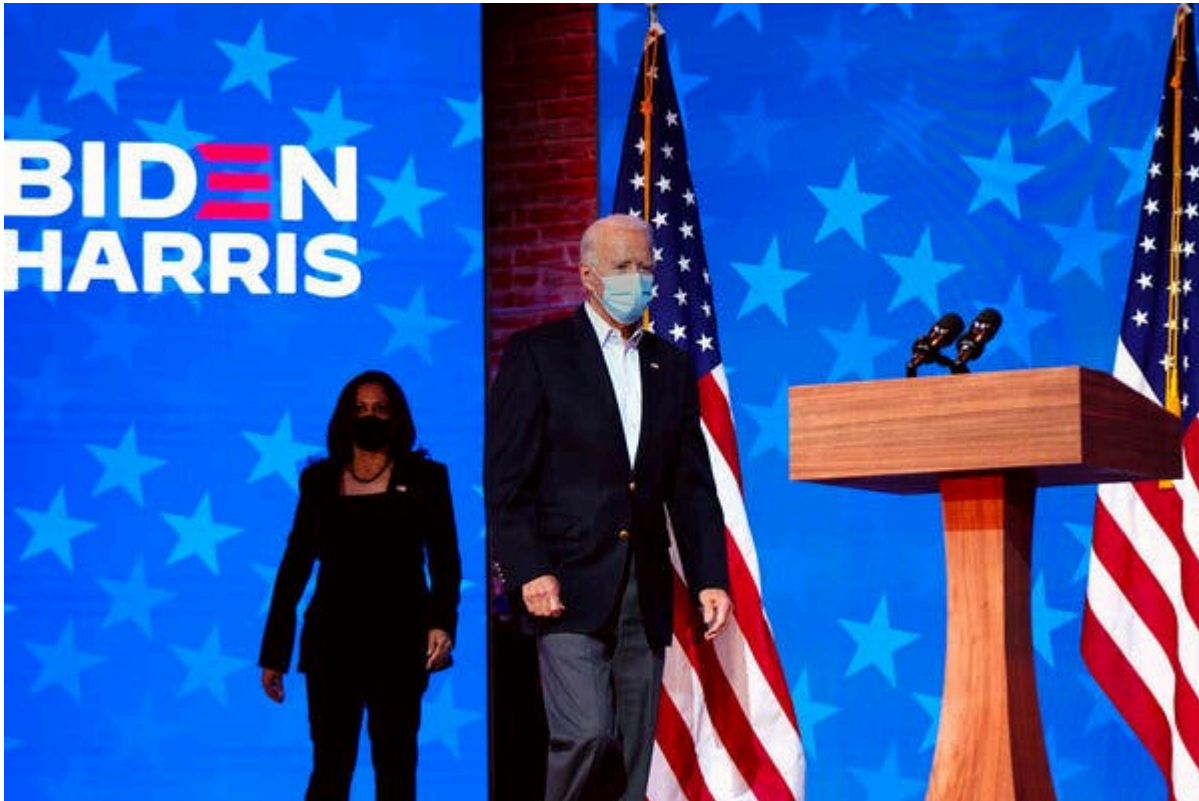


# Biden to Face Long List of Foreign Challenges, With China No. 1

President Trump will be handing Joseph R. Biden Jr. a difficult cleanup act in America's relations with many countries. But it may not take much for Mr. Biden to improve the mood.



President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. is inheriting a landscape of challenges and ill will toward the United States in many countries. Credit...Erin Schaff/The New York Times

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U.S. relations with China are the worst since the countries normalized ties four decades ago. America's allies in Europe are alienated. The most important nuclear anti-proliferation treaty is about to expire with Russia. Iran is amassing enriched nuclear fuel again, and North Korea is brandishing its atomic arsenal.

Not to mention global warming, refugee crises, and looming famines in some of the poorest places on earth, all amplified by the pandemic.

President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. is inheriting a landscape of challenges and ill-

will toward the United States in countries hostile to President Trump's "America First" mantra, his unpredictability, embrace of autocratic leaders, and resistance to international cooperation. Mr. Biden also could face difficulties in dealing with governments that had hoped for Mr. Trump's re-election — particularly Israel and Saudi Arabia, which share the president's deep antipathy toward Iran.

But Mr. Biden's past as head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as vice president in the Obama administration have given him a familiarity with international affairs that could work to his advantage, foreign policy experts who know him say.

## JOE BIDEN

Read more on the *president-elect's policies*

"President Trump has lowered the bar so much that it wouldn't take much for Biden to change the perception dramatically," said Robert Malley, chief executive of the International Crisis Group and a former adviser in the Obama White House. "Saying a few of the things Trump hasn't said — to rewind the tape on multilateralism, climate change, human rights — will sound very loud and significant."

Here are the most pressing foreign policy areas the Biden administration will face:



Outside the United States Consulate in Chengdu in July, after China ordered the United States to close the consulate there. Credit...Ng Han Guan/Associated Press

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## **The challenge of U.S.-China relations**

Nothing is more urgent, in the eyes of many experts than reversing the downward trajectory of relations with China, the economic superpower and geopolitical rival that Mr. Trump has engaged in what many are calling a new Cold War. Disputes over trade, the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and technology have metastasized during Mr. Trump's term, his critics say, worsened by the president's racist declarations that China infected the world with the coronavirus and should be held accountable.

"China is kind of the radioactive core of America's foreign policy issues," said Orville Schell, director of the Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations.

Mr. Biden has not necessarily helped himself with his own negative depiction of China and its authoritarian leader, President Xi Jinping, during the 2020 campaign. The two were once seen as having developed a friendly relationship during the Obama years. But Mr. Biden, perhaps acting partly to counter Mr.

Trump's accusations that he would be lenient toward China, has recently called Mr. Xi a "thug."



A market in Tehran last month. American tensions with Iran remain high. Credit...Arash Khamooshi for The New York Times

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## **The Middle East: Shifts on Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran?**

Mr. Biden has vowed to reverse what he called the “dangerous failure” of Mr. Trump’s Iran policy, which repudiated the 2015 nuclear agreement and replaced it with tightening sanctions that have caused deep economic damage in Iran and left the United States largely isolated on this issue.

Mr. Biden has offered to rejoin the agreement, which constricts Iran’s nuclear capabilities if Tehran adheres to its provisions and commits to further negotiations. He also has pledged to immediately nullify Mr. Trump’s travel ban affecting Iran and several other Muslim-majority countries.

Whether Iran's hierarchy will accept Mr. Biden's approach is unclear. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has said the United States is untrustworthy regardless who is in the White House. At the same time, "Iran is desperate for a deal," said Cliff Kupchan, chairman of the Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy.

Still, Mr. Kupchan said, Mr. Biden will face enormous difficulties in any negotiations with Iran aimed at strengthening restrictions on its nuclear activities — weaknesses Mr. Trump had cited to justify renouncing the nuclear agreement.

"The substance will be tough — we've seen this movie and it's not easy," Mr. Kupchan said. "I think Biden's challenge is that it will not end up blowing up in his face."

Mr. Biden's Iran policy could alienate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who leveraged Mr. Trump's confrontational approach to help strengthen Israel's relations with Gulf Arab countries, punctuated by normalization of diplomatic ties with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. How Mr. Biden manages relations with Saudi Arabia, which considers Iran an enemy, will also be a challenge.

"There's a very hard square to circle here," Mr. Kupchan said.

Mr. Trump's extremely favorable treatment of Israel in the protracted conflict with the Palestinians also could prove nettlesome as Mr. Biden navigates a different path in the Middle East. He has criticized Israeli settlement construction in occupied lands the Palestinians want for a future state. And he is likely to restore contacts with the Palestinian leadership.

"Benjamin Netanyahu can expect an uncomfortable period of adjustment," an Israeli columnist, Yossi Verter, wrote Friday in the Haaretz newspaper.

At the same time, Mr. Biden also has a history of cordial relations with Mr. Netanyahu. Mr. Biden has said he would not reverse Mr. Trump's transfer of the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv — a relocation that deeply angered the Palestinians.

# Repairing relations with Europe and navigating Brexit

While Mr. Trump often disparaged the European Union and strongly encouraged Britain's exit from the bloc, Mr. Biden has expressed the opposite position. Like former President Barack Obama, he supported close American relations with bloc leaders and opposed Brexit.

Mr. Biden's ascendance could prove especially awkward for Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, who had embraced Mr. Trump and had been counting on achieving a trade deal with the United States before his country's divorce from the bloc takes full effect. Mr. Biden may be in no hurry to complete such an agreement.

While many Europeans will be happy to see Mr. Trump go, the damage they say he has done to America's reliability will not be easily erased.

"We had differences, but there was never a basic mistrust about having common views of the world," Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former prime minister of Norway, told The New York Times last month. Over the past four years, she said, European leaders had learned they could "no longer take for granted that they can trust the U.S., even on basic things."



A photo released by the official North Korean government news service shows a test launch of a Hwasong-14, one of North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missiles. Credit...Korean Central News Agency

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## **Confronting North Korea's nuclear threat**

Mr. Trump has described his friendship and three meetings with Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader, as a success that averted war with the nuclear-armed hermetic country. But critics say Mr. Trump's approach not only failed to persuade Mr. Kim to relinquish his arsenal of nuclear weapons and missiles, it bought Mr. Kim time to strengthen them. Last month the North unveiled what appeared to be its largest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile.

"On Trump's watch, the North's nuclear weapons program has grown apace, its missile capabilities have expanded, and Pyongyang can now target the United States with an ICBM," said Evans J.R. Revere, a former State Department official and expert on North Korea. "That is the legacy that Trump will soon pass on to Biden, and it will be an enormous burden."

Mr. Biden, who has been described by North Korea's official news agency as

a rabid dog that “must be beaten to death with a stick,” has criticized Mr. Trump’s approach as appeasement of a dictator. Mr. Biden has said he would press for denuclearization and “stand with South Korea,” but has not specified how he would deal with North Korean belligerence.



As vice president, Mr. Biden pushed for sanctions against Russia over President Vladimir V. Putin’s annexation of Crimea. Credit... Pool photo by Mikhail Klimentyev

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## **A likely tougher approach to Russia and Putin**

Mr. Biden has long asserted that he would take a much harder line with Russia than Mr. Trump, who questioned NATO’s usefulness, doubted intelligence warnings on Russia’s interference in U.S. elections, admired President Vladimir V. Putin, and said that improving American relations with the Kremlin would benefit all. Mr. Biden, who as vice president pushed for sanctions against Russia over its annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula in 2014 — the biggest illegal land



seizure in Europe since World War II — might seek to extend those sanctions and take other punitive steps.

While tensions with Russia would likely rise, arms control is one area where Mr. Biden and Mr. Putin share a desire for progress. Mr. Biden is set to be sworn in just a few weeks before the scheduled expiration of the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. He has said he wants to negotiate an extension of the treaty without preconditions.



A migrant from Honduras, near the border in Juárez, Mexico, seeking asylum in the United States. Credit...Daniel Berehulak for The New York Times

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## **A return to the Paris Agreement and international commitments**

Mr. Biden has said one of his first acts as president will be to rejoin the Paris Climate accord to limit global warming, which the United States officially left under Mr. Trump on Wednesday. Mr. Biden also has said he would restore U.S. membership in the World Health Organization, which Mr. Trump repudiated in

the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, describing the W.H.O. as a lackey of China.

More broadly, Mr. Biden is expected to reverse many of the isolationist and anti-immigrant steps taken during the Trump administration, which are widely seen by Mr. Trump's critics as shameful stains on American standing in the world. Mr. Biden has said he would disband Mr. Trump's immigration restrictions, stop construction of his border wall with Mexico, expand resources for immigrants and provide a path to citizenship for people living in the United States illegally.

Nonetheless, many of Mr. Trump's policies had considerable support in the United States, and it remains to be seen how quickly or effectively Mr. Biden can change them. The convulsions that roiled American democracy and the divisive election have also sown doubts about Mr. Biden's ability to deliver on his pledges.

"There is relief at a return to some kind of normalcy, but at the same time, history cannot be erased," said Jean-Marie Guehenno, a French diplomat who is a fellow at the Brookings Institution's Foreign Policy Program and a former under-secretary-general for peacekeeping operations at the United Nations. "The kind of soft power that the United States has enjoyed in the past has largely evaporated."

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