

AMERICAS

# Biden-Harris Administration: Dawn of a New Era?

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By **Abhinav Mehrotra**



Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz

As Joseph R. Biden, Jr assumed office as President of the United States of America, he faces a plethora of issues ranging from refuting back majority of troops from war fronts in Afghanistan and Middle East to one of the most significant issue of protection of human rights that requires the US in complying with its obligations under the International Human Rights Law by protecting the human rights of its people and at an international level. This is something that US has done in the past by *writing the rules, forging the agreements, strengthening the institutions* that regulate relations among nations and advancing security under both Republican and Democratic Presidents such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights which laid the foundation for the International Bill of Rights that include covenants on civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights and the UDHR itself.*

What needs to be understood, is the contradiction in the approach that US has adopted in past when it becomes part of international human rights covenants but refuses to enforce its obligations at the municipal level. To make matters worse, the US Supreme Court in the judgement of *Medellin v. Texas* had ruled that the President cannot obligate the states to comply with treaty obligations that means even though the obligations constitute international commitment, it cannot be implemented unless the Congress enacts a separate legislation or the treaty under consideration is "self-executing" which does not require enactment of a separate legislation.

As of 2020, only two ratifications of human rights treaties resulted in the changes of the US domestic laws and the governmental policies. One of which is holding those responsible both criminally and civilly for committing torture and other mistreatment and the other being the outlawing of genocide under the conventions dealing with torture (UNCAT) and prevention and prohibition and of genocide.

It cannot be overemphasized that the foremost issue which the Biden-Harris administration would have to deal with is the strengthening of the internal administration in the US such as a divided Congress, resistant federal judiciary and loss of faith on the competence and credibility of the UN system organizations.

Coming to the last four years under Trump administration, the consistent pulling out of treaties after treaties, mass migration and rise in authoritarianism and nationalism has resulted in grave violations because of which the group that has suffered the most are the refugees. As soon as Trump administration took charge, the entry of Syrian refugees were indefinitely suspended as well as the refugee admission ceiling for nationals from other countries were reduced and the most staggering step was banning nationals of 11 countries including *Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen* that has been *revoked by the Biden administration.*

Most recently, former President Trump and his administration labeled the Houthis as "foreign terrorist organization" that has limited the humanitarian support provided to the people in Northern Yemen that is controlled by Ansar Allah movement i.e. the Houthis. However, the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken has stated that the administration would review the designation keeping in mind the hindrance caused to supply of humanitarian assistance especially in times of COVID-19

From an international perspective, the US needs to take charge and the Biden administration needs to prioritize certain issues affecting the international human rights regime. The foremost priority being commitment to multilateralism by playing a proactive role in the working of the HRC by rejoining the same; reestablishing the funding of UN agencies which has been initiated by Biden administration by rejoining the WHO and most significantly ratifying the core international human rights treaties dealing with issues like economic, social and cultural rights; rights of persons with disabilities, elimination of discrimination against women and rights of child.

Further, in order to show its commitment toward diplomatic relations, the US should reinvest in treaty alliances with countries like Australia, Japan and South Korea and integrate Latin American and African countries as well as deepen partnerships with countries in Asia like India, Indonesia etc, especially given the increase in the interventionist activities of China through its **bullying diplomacy and extraterritorial belligerence** and the recent military coup in Myanmar combined with the treatment meted out to the Rohingya community in the past

For US to emerge as the torchbearer of peace and harmony, it needs to establish National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) that aim to promote and monitor implementation and compliance with human rights obligations. The setting up of NHRIs would eventually help the US to re-emerge as global leader of human rights that sets an example for others to follow. This would further strengthen the belief and hope from the Biden-Harris administration to deliver on its promise that **democracy and liberalism will triumph over fascism and autocracy.**

Taking a step further, the Biden-Harris administration should emphasize policies that provide clear, simultaneous benefits at home whose impacts are visible and tangible given the death of George Floyd at the hand of Minneapolis Police Department which led to mass protests over the whole country and around the world.

Seen in this light, the US needs to assume the role that is expected from them by taking along all the concerned stakeholders and building partnerships and most significantly taking the lead and establishing the NHRIs to show its seriousness towards the cause of international peace and security that would mean less rhetorical emphasis on the abstract cause of "the liberal international order" and more practical demonstrations of the United States' distinctive ability to deliver on issues that matter right to the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Such expectations were also expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, who hopes that issues like refugee resettlement in US; return of US to the U.N. Human Rights Council confronting racial discrimination and acting upon the reversal of orders on issues pertaining to US Mexico border that the Biden administration has already issued.

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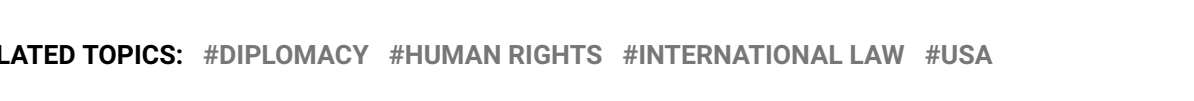
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U.S. facing an Impasse on Key Political Breakthroughs

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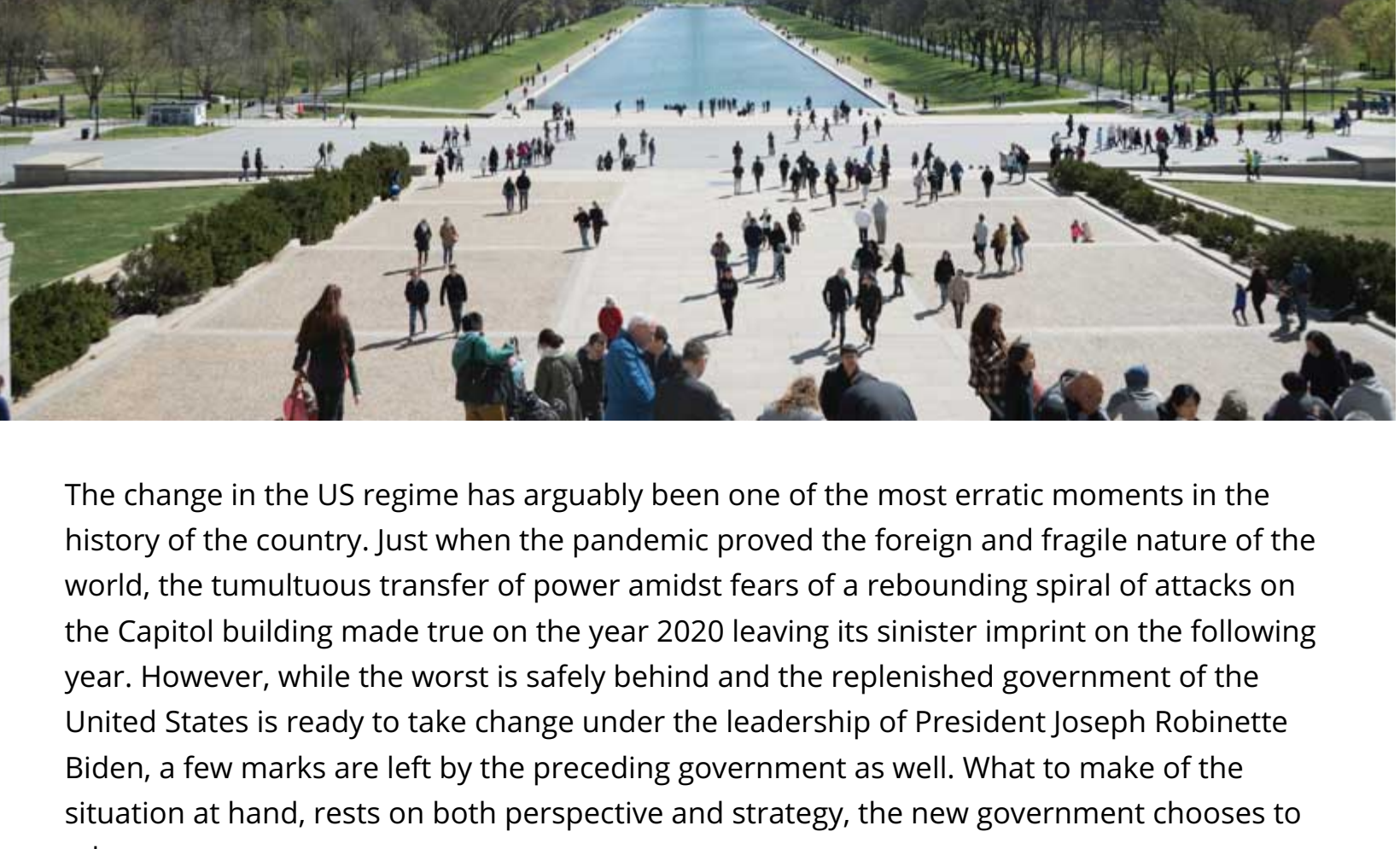
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# U.S. facing an Impasse on Key Political Breakthroughs

Published 23 hours ago on February 9, 2021  
By **Syed Zain Abbas Rizvi**



The change in the US regime has arguably been one of the most erratic moments in the history of the country. Just when the pandemic proved the foreign and fragile nature of the world, the tumultuous transfer of power amidst fears of a rebounding spiral of attacks on the Capitol building made true on the year 2020 leaving its sinister imprint on the following year. However, while the worst is safely behind and the replenished government of the United States is ready to take change under the leadership of President Joseph Robinette Biden, a few marks are left by the preceding government as well. What to make of the situation at hand, rests on both perspective and strategy, the new government chooses to adopt.

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# Syria Between Turning Over Trump's Page and Reviving Obama's Heritage

Published 1 day ago on February 8, 2021  
By **Dr. Basel Haj Jassem**



U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to appoint Brett McGurk as coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa to his team at the National Security Council remind one the circumstances and atmosphere that accompanied his "early" resignation when he was the U.S. special presidential envoy for the global coalition "ISIS" in late 2018, when he protested the decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria.

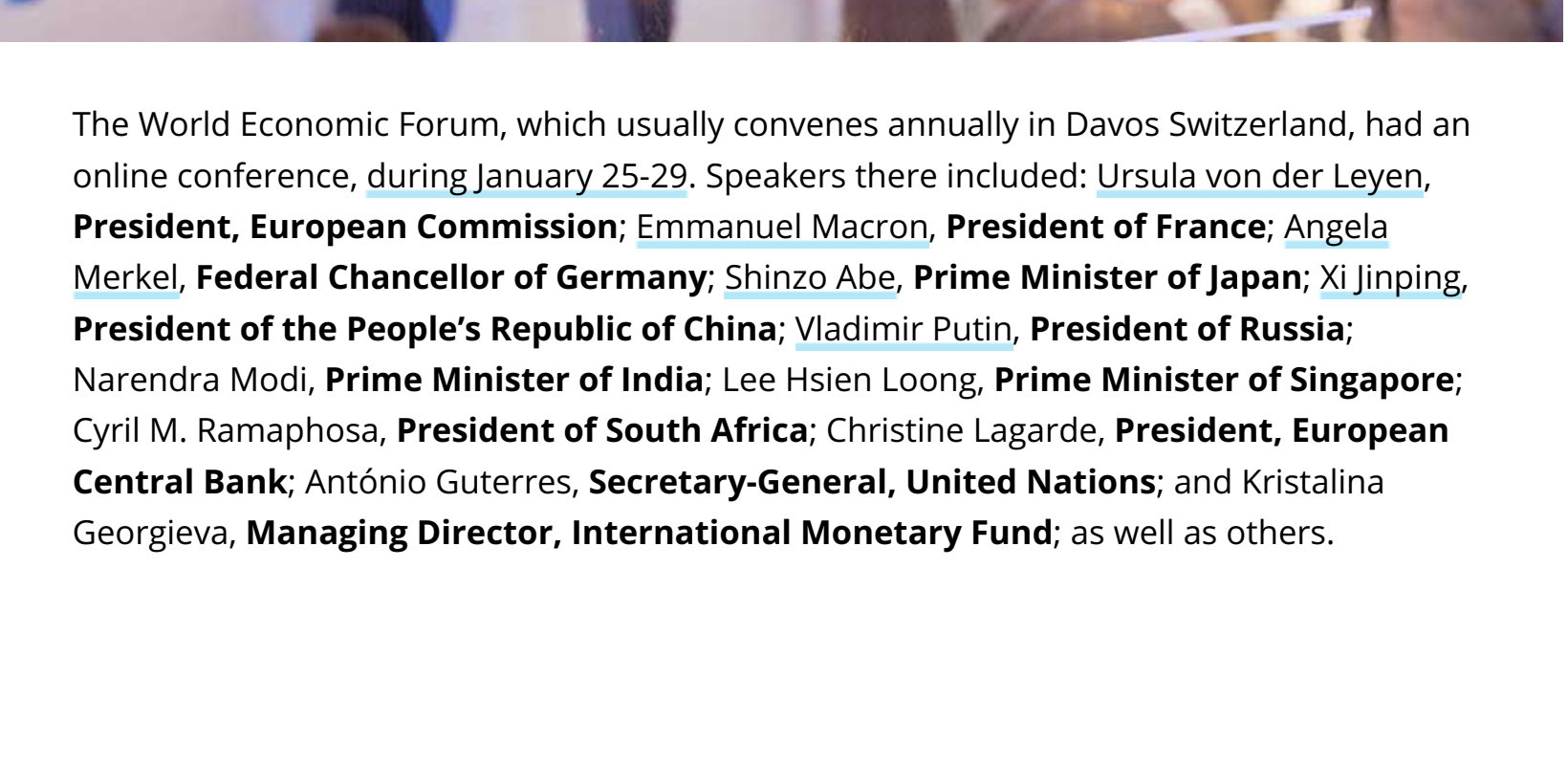
Former President Donald Trump commented on McGurk's resignation, "Brett McGurk, who I do not know, was appointed by President Obama in 2015. Was supposed to leave in February but he just resigned prior to leaving. Grandstander? The Fake News is making such a big deal about this nothing event!" and a senior Trump administration official

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Published 3 days ago on February 7, 2021  
By **Eric Zuesse**



The World Economic Forum, which usually convenes annually in Davos Switzerland, had an online conference, during January 25-29. Speakers there included: Ursula von der Leyen, **President, European Commission**; Emmanuel Macron, **President of France**; Angela Merkel, **Federal Chancellor of Germany**; Shinzo Abe, **Prime Minister of Japan**; Xi Jinping, **President of the People's Republic of China**; Vladimir Putin, **President of Russia**; Narendra Modi, **Prime Minister of India**; Lee Hsien Loong, **Prime Minister of Singapore**; Cyril M. Ramaphosa, **President of South Africa**; Christine Lagarde, **President, European Central Bank**; António Guterres, **Secretary-General, United Nations**; and Kristalina Georgieva, **Managing Director, International Monetary Fund**; as well as others.

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