



HOW WILL THE US-CHINA RELATIONS DEVELOP IN THE BIDEN ERA?

The Democrat candidate Joseph Biden officially took office as the 46th President of the United States of America (USA) on January 20th, 2021. Thus, 78-year-old Joe Biden became the oldest president of the United States. Kamala Harris made history as the first female Vice President in the US history. In fact, according to the official results announced by the Federal Election Commission of the US Presidential Elections on November 3rd, 2020, the Democratic Party candidate, Joe Biden, with 81,283,495 votes (51.3%) and 306 delegates, defeated the 45th President of the USA, Donald Trump, with 74,223,755 votes (46.9%) and 232 delegates. Some critical developments such as the Biden-Trump debates during the election campaign, Trump's appeal against the election results, the raid of the US Congress building and the impeachment investigation against Trump have led to the 2020 US Presidential Elections being recorded as the most controversial presidential elections in the history of the country. The priorities and possible consequences of the US foreign policy during Joe Biden's presidency, who won such an election and came to the presidency, is one of the agendas that the whole world has eagerly awaited.

In this context, how the relations between the two largest economies of the world, the USA and China, will develop in the Biden era is an issue that needs to be analyzed. One of the important issues that awaits the Biden administration in international relations is the future of the US-China relations. It is also obvious that US-China relations, which have become increasingly strained during the Trump era, have declined to the lowest level since 1979, when Washington and Beijing established official diplomatic relations. Even if Beijing and Washington take a step back, it can be predicted that it will take time for the US-China relations to normalize again.

First of all, from a geostrategic point of view, it will not be a coincidence that the global competition between the USA and China will continue to deepen day by day. The tension between Washington and Beijing during the Trump era can be seen as a reflection of the ongoing global competition between the US and China, which has intensified in recent years. From this point of view, it is certain that the US foreign policy towards China will not change immediately with Biden's appointment to the presidency. In this context, it can be said that the Biden administration will first try to consolidate its relations with its allies, which have weakened in recent years due to various reasons. Biden, who made many decisions in his first week in office, re-included his country in the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization, lifted Trump's travel ban on some Muslim countries and cancelled the funds provided to build the wall on the US-Mexico border. By taking the aforementioned steps, Biden, in the short term, shows that he attaches importance to strengthening country's global leadership and to improving relations with many countries.

One of the main problems that the Biden administration will face in the US-China relations is the commercial-economic disputes between the two countries. These disputes also caused the US-China Trade War that started in March 2018 and lasted for about 18 months. Despite the signing of the first phase of the US-China Trade Agreement in Washington in January 2020, the ongoing commercial-economic disputes between the two countries could not be resolved with this agreement. The negative effects of the US-China Trade War, which shook the global trade system, on the trade volume between the two countries still persists. For example, in 2019, US-China trade volume was \$541.2 billion, a 14.6% decrease from 2018, although it increased by 8.8% to \$586.7 billion in 2020. The volume of \$633.52 billion in 2018 has not yet been reached. Considering the deepening negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the world economy, it is obvious that both Washington and Beijing need to resolve their commercial-economic disputes. It is not yet clear whether the Biden administration will continue to resolve trade and economic disputes with the Beijing administration using the first phase US-China Trade Agreement signed during the Trump era. President Biden nominating Katherine Tai, who has been legal counsel for US-China trade disputes in the US Trade Representative Office for several years, for the post of trade representative may be a sign that Biden attaches great importance to trade and economic disputes with China.

The current state of US-China relations, in addition to bilateral trade, economic and political disputes, especially the trade war, are faced with many other issues such as the South China Sea disputes, the Japan-China islands crisis, the North Korea nuclear issue, Iran's nuclear program, the India-China border issue, the Taiwan issue, the Hong Kong issue, the Tibet issue and the East Turkistan issue. In particular, the issues of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and East Turkistan, which are defined as "internal affairs" by the Beijing administration, are among the most sensitive issues in China's relations with the USA. Speaking at the online meeting of the National Committee for US-China Relations on February 2nd, 2021, Yang Jiechi, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Foreign Relations Committee and Member of the CCP Political Bureau, called on the Biden administration to restore relations, demanding that Washington should not interfere in these "internal affairs" of China. Given that democracy and human rights are essential elements of the US foreign policy, rhetorically, it is expected that the Biden administration will continue to criticize the human rights violations in Hong Kong, Tibet and East Turkistan, as well as the Taiwan issue.

From a geopolitical perspective, it can be predicted that the Asia-Pacific region, which accounts for about two-thirds of the world population and 40% of the global Gross Domestic Product, will be the center of gravity of the Biden administration's foreign policy ap-

proach. This region is the scene of many geopolitical events within the framework of the South China Sea disputes, the Japan-China islands crisis, the North Korea nuclear issue, the India-China border issues and the Taiwan issue. Therefore, the Asia-Pacific region, in other words the Indo-Pacific region, retained its strategic importance in the US foreign policy during the Barack Obama and Trump presidencies. The Obama administration, in which Biden served as the vice president, has brought the "Return to Asia" strategy to the agenda since 2011. It can be said that the Biden administration, similar to the Trump administration, will continue the Indo-Pacific approach that has gained importance for the USA and its allies in recent years. It is clear that there is an aim to prevent China's increasing political and economic influence in the region by emphasizing India against the backdrop of the Indo-Pacific approach, which defines the vast geography connecting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as a single geopolitical and geostrategic region. In addition, Kamala Harris, whom Biden appointed as the Vice President, considered to have a good experience and that many Indian-Americans take part in the Biden administration, it can be easily understood that the Biden administration would attach importance to the development of the US-India relations and the India-China border discussions in the coming period.

On the other hand, in November 2020, in the region, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) after eight years of negotiations with Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand, which are the dialogue partners of the union, disturbed the USA to a certain extent. Therefore, it can be stated that the Biden administration will re-join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which the Obama administration launched in October 2015 and the Trump administration withdrew from in January 2017.

In summary, it is inevitable that the Biden administration, who took office as the 46th President of the USA, will define China as a great competitor in terms of the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic interests of the country. We live in a period when the USA is trying to protect its global hegemony and China is trying to increase its regional and global influence. Biden's foreign policy approach towards Beijing may not be similar to that of his predecessor Trump, but it can be predicted that he will aim to contain China in the face of US interests. It should be expected that during Biden's presidency, the US-China relations will continue both in competition and cooperation as before. In the rapidly changing geopolitical environment, the issue of whether cooperation or competition between Washington and Beijing will come to the fore is closely related to the steps to be taken by the parties in the upcoming period.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Prime Ministers of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan Ulukbek Maripov and Askar Mamin, who participated in a meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council in Almaty, had bilateral talks. The parties discussed comprehensive economic cooperation, including issues of trade, investments, transport and water-energy sectors. The Prime Ministers agreed to organize the ninth meeting of the Kyrgyz-Kazakh Intergovernmental Council in Kazakhstan this year. Askar Mamin, congratulated his counterpart with the appointment and wished him successful work (Kabar, 06.02.2021).
- Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan deepen their economic cooperation. Recently, senior officials of the countries signed a multi-billion-dollar roadmap for a landmark rail link, which would connect Central and South Asia and boost interregional trade. According to Uzbekistan's deputy prime minister, Sardor Umurzakov, peace in Afghanistan will lead to economic growth in the region. The costs of the 573 km railway track have amounted to \$4.8 billion. The countries plan to attract the loan from international financial institutions (02.02.2021, Anadolu Agency).
- The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova sent a letter to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi and foreign ministers of the EU member states on a common strategic vision for the further development of the Eastern Partnership initiative. In a joint letter, the Ministers asked for the introduction of an ambitious approach to deepen their integration with the EU. The countries outlined their Eastern Partnership priorities and reiterated their commitments to the European vector of development (Ukrinform.net, 02.02.2021).
- The Chairman of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (lower chamber of parliament) of Tajikistan, Mahmadoir Zokirzoda, held a meeting with the Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Tajikistan, Hasan Mamed-zade. The sides exchanged views on bilateral political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation between the two countries. The parties also discussed the prospects of further expansion of parliamentary cooperation between Tajikistan and Azerbaijan and expressed a willingness to bring bilateral relations to a new level (Asiaplustj.info, 05.02.2021).
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia Batmunkh Battsetseg had a telephone conversation with her Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. The Mongolian Minister, Batmunkh Battsetseg, expressed a willingness to contribute to the development of bilateral cooperation in all fields. The sides also appreciated the idea of celebrating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Russia throughout 2021 (Montsame.mn, 04.04.2021).
- Turkey and Azerbaijan began to conduct large-scale joint military exercises in eastern Anatolia near the city of Kars. The military exercise is a sign of deepening ties between the two Turkic allies, after Azerbaijan's successful operation of bringing the Nagorno-Karabakh region back under control. The drills are intended to ensure combat capabilities under winter conditions and will last throughout 1-12 February (Rferl.org, 02.02.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Askar Mamin, conducted a government session where he announced the main goals for the government in 2021, which included 3% economic growth, investment in fixed capital up to 20% of GDP, 1.4 fold growth in labor productivity in agriculture and reduction of unemployment to 4.9%. The government will work to increase the share of the small and medium enterprises to 30% of GDP and will pay special attention to public health and education (Kazinform, 02.02.2021).
- According to the Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission Mikhail Myasnikov, the economies of the Eurasian Economic Union will grow by 3.2% in 2021. In 2020, all members of the union experienced economic decline, which was estimated at 3.9%. Myasnikov also announced potential projects of the EAEU countries. These include the provision of raw materials for the steel industry and the coordination of breeding livestock programs. He mentioned that it is important to protect the internal market of the union (BelTA, 05.02.2021).
- The Prime Minister of Belarus, Roman Golovchenko, participated in the Digital Almaty Forum, where he informed about the development of the country's Hi-Tech Park. According to Golovchenko, the export of the Hi-Tech Park exceeded \$2.5 billion in 2020, which was equal to more than 20% of the country's services exports. The Prime Minister mentioned that Belarus achieved significant results in digital development. In particular, it has a leading position in Europe in terms of fiber-optic-equipped buildings (BelTA, 05.02.2021).
- The Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Ulukbek Maripov signed a decision to finance nine important agricultural projects. The targeted sectors include animal husbandry, crop production and processing of agricultural products, which will be supported through favorable interest rates for a period of 60 months. The interest rate for animal breeding and crop production will be at 10%, while contract farmers will obtain a lower interest rate at 8%. The interest rate for food processing enterprises will amount to 6% (24.kg, 05.02.2021).
- The United Nations recently released its World Economic Situation and Prospects report, according to which, the economy of Azerbaijan is expected to grow by 2% in 2021. In 2020, the country's economy declined by 3.9% due to lower oil production within the framework of the OPEC+ agreement and the pandemic. In 2021, annual inflation in Azerbaijan is expected to accelerate to 3.2%, while in 2020 it amounted to 3.1%. It is expected that the country's economy will grow by 2% in 2022 (AzerNews, 05.02.2021).
- The Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulla Aripov participated in the International Digital Almaty Forum. According to Aripov, Uzbekistan plans to raise \$2.5 billion to develop its digital infrastructure. In particular, the government will launch three new data centers. The country plans to transform its education, healthcare, banking and agricultural sectors through digital technologies. Demand for digital services is increasing and more than 14 million people in Uzbekistan use electronic payment systems (UzReport, 06.02.2021).

Society and Culture

- According to an international audit and consulting network FinExpertiza, some 656.3 thousand people have acquired Russian citizenship in 2020. The vast majority of the people acquiring Russian citizenship were (409.5 thousand people) citizens of Ukraine, followed by Tajikistan - 63.4 thousand, Kazakhstan - 43.4 thousand, Armenia - 30.5 thousand and Uzbekistan - 23.1 thousand. The main factor for the growth in the number of Russian passport recipients is the facilitation of migration policy in 2020 (En.kabar.kg, 05.02.2021).
- The "Cendere" Avenue in the ancient district of Sariyer of Istanbul, was renamed "Azerbaijan" Avenue. The official opening ceremony was attended by local municipality authorities the Consul General of Azerbaijan Narmina Mustafayeva, as well as other Azerbaijani diplomats. The renaming of one of the largest avenues in Istanbul in honor of Azerbaijan symbolizes the friendship and brotherhood of the two Turkic countries (Azertag.az, 04.02.2021).
- The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) donated laboratory equipment, reagents and supplies for diagnosing COVID-19 worth \$310,964 to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Tajikistan (MHSP). The donation has been done as part of the CDC's ongoing project in Tajikistan aimed at helping the country to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, the CDC will spend \$1.6 million for COVID-19 response in Tajikistan (Tj.usembassy.gov, 02.02.2021).
- A winter school for women from Afghanistan who are studying in higher educational institutions of Uzbekistan has begun its work. The school was opened within the framework of the project titled "Supporting the economic opportunities of Afghan women through training and internship in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan". The aim of the project is to enhance the educational potential of Afghan female students and to promote gender equality upon return to their homeland (Eurasiatoday.ru, 03.02.2021).
- The State Committee of Water Resources of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources of Tajikistan and the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) held an online meeting discussing the issues of efficient water use in the region. The parties exchanged views on the implementation of the proposals aimed at improving the environmental condition and development of water management in the region. The participants also paid special attention to finding solutions to climate change problems in the Aral basin (Trend.az, 04.02.2021).
- International Scientific and Practical Conference entitled "Alisher Navoi in the Context of World Orientalists" dedicated to the 580th anniversary of the birth of the Great Turkic poet and thinker, Alisher Navoi, was held at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies. The Secretariat of the Turkic Council along with 130 scholars from 60 universities representing 15 countries took part in the event. The participants discussed Alisher Navoi's valuable contributions to culture, literature, politics, public administration, scientific and educational spheres of the Turkic world (Turkkon.org, 05.02.2021).