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Crisis & Opportunity: Biden's first 100 days and beyond

Ryan Walker reports on the new US President's impact in the first few months of his administration



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The significance and symbolism of the “first 100 days” of a new president’s administration dates back to the time of the 32nd President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, when he coined the term during a July 1933 radio address.

Since then, it has been used as a milestone in every successive new presidential administration to mark early success. It is, then, not lost on those who follow politics that the 46th President, Joseph R. Biden, held a March 2nd meeting with presidential historians to discuss the triumphs of his predecessors like Lyndon Johnson, Abraham Lincoln, and, of course, FDR — after whom Biden is said to be modelling his presidency.

Like FDR, President Biden has proposed — and to some extent passed — an aggressive and progressive policy agenda. Furthermore, although not facing a world war like FDR, Biden is combating numerous crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a broken global supply chain, rising energy prices, a flood of immigrants at the U.S. Southern border, racial justice, and a volatile economic recovery, just to name a few.

Early success

Yet, despite these evolving crises, the Biden Administration has had some early success by proposing — and Congress passing — the “American Rescue Plan” to abate the economic damages caused by the pandemic emergency response. This \$1.9 trillion legislation focused on expanding the nationwide vaccination program and aiding families most

in need by providing those that qualify with a \$1,400 direct payment from the government, extending unemployment benefits, allocating \$130 billion to reopening schools, and \$160 billion for the supplies and workforce necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

In addition to this substantial legislative effort, President Biden has signed 42 executive orders (EO) — the most since FDR’s 99 EOs during his first 100 days. However, even with successes like administering over 200 million vaccine doses in the U.S., the clear focus from the White House was undoing as many of the policies from the previous Trump Administration as possible.

Through April 23rd, according to the American Presidency Project, Biden has undone 62 of 219 orders signed by President Trump—more than twice as many orders in his first 100 days as the last three presidents combined. Many of these actions relate to the bureaucratic machinations of government, but several are significant from a policy and political perspective.

Rejoining the Paris Climate Accord delivered on a key campaign promise from Biden and completely reversed Trump’s position that it “handicaps the United States economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country’s expense.”

The Biden White House even went a step further in cementing the importance climate will play in its policymaking by convening, for the first time since its inception during the George W. Bush

Administration, the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate. Additionally, the Biden-Harris team stopped the U.S. exit from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and further construction of “the wall” along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Diplomatically, President Biden has maintained the same hard-lined posture as the Trump Administration on matters involving China while focusing much of his efforts during the first 100 days on Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia. We can expect the approach to China to change from rhetorical combat to a multi-lateral approach involving the European Union and other major U.S. trading partners.

National security

Like Trump, Biden has committed to ending the generational conflict in Afghanistan, but delayed the Trump imposed deadline of May 1st for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops to September 11th — setting the stage for additional political theatre as the world prepares to honor those lost during the 20th anniversary of the attacks on New York City, Washington, DC, and United Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Further complicating matters in the Middle East, as it has with other U.S. presidents, Iran continues to pose a national security threat as well as a diplomatic conundrum. Specifically, for President Biden, reentering the Iran Nuclear Deal was a centrepiece of his campaign foreign policy promises, but has yet to produce tangible results



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largely because Iran has boosted its uranium enrichment and through its various “third parties” continues to antagonise and stoke the flames of conflict in areas such as Yemen, Israel, and Iraq.

Conversely, President Biden has had direct bilateral communication with Russian President Putin and even discussed the idea of a summit between the two nations hosted by a third-party country similar to those meetings held between then President Trump and North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un.

Notably, the President will embark on his first foreign trip in mid-June. Travelling to the G7 summit in Cornwall, England and to a NATO summit in Brussels, Belgium, Biden will attempt to reverse another of the Trump Administration’s signature actions — tariffs. To date, both sides have made concessions by agreeing to suspend tariff increases in an effort to reset the relationship. However, the key point of contention — steel and aluminum tariffs — could be a hill too high to climb for either side. Since the U.S. has imposed tariffs on EU metals as “national security threat” — citing Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 — steel prices have skyrocketed and relations between the EU and U.S. have deteriorated into an “eye-for-an-eye” posture.

Yet, even with Biden’s goodwill tour of the continent, it will be difficult to roll these back as the steel industry and trade unions have already begun lobbying the White House to keep them in place while the prospect of a large infrastructure bill looms on the horizon.

New legislation

The first 100 days of the Biden Administration have been full of activity, but activity does not equate to productivity, unfortunately. Given that the President’s party controls both chambers of Congress, President Biden was only able to muster 11 pieces of legislation passed and signed into law — second fewest of Administrations



dating back to FDR.

The House of Representatives maintains an eight-seat majority (with five vacancies) and the Senate stands at an even 50-50 split with Vice President Kamala Harris serving as the tie-breaking vote as needed. Therefore, the key to President Biden’s purported ambition to remake America in the same vein as President Franklin Roosevelt may lie with West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) and his opinion on forthcoming pre-eminent legislation such as:

- the \$2 trillion infrastructure proposal known as the “American Jobs Plan” and its companion the \$1.8 trillion “American Families Plan”, which aims to increase federal funding in education, child care and paid family leave by reversing the 2017 tax cuts;
- returning the top marginal rate to 39.6% from the current 37%;
- increasing capital gains taxes on households making more than \$1 million;
- readjusting estate taxation;
- ending the practice of carried interest; and

- stepping up Internal Revenue Service (IRS) enforcement.

In addition to the aforementioned legislation, other matters, like climate — and how the U.S. will reach net zero emissions by 2050 — demand attention prior to COP26 in Glasgow this November. The progressive wing of the Democratic Party will demand action on immigration and police reform prior to the 2022 midterm elections.

Furthermore, breaking through the U.S. vaccination rate plateau by convincing those that are hesitant that it is indeed safe and effective while staving off inflation, finding a way to solve the growing labor shortage plaguing what would otherwise be a more robust economic recovery, securing our critical infrastructure from cyber threats, and making sure all Americans have an affordable, reliable, and abundant source of energy are just a few of the many important issues facing this Administration in just the near term and primarily on the domestic front. ■



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