

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Biden Must Go Further

The Takeaway:

- If it seems like there's suddenly a lot happening on foreign policy, it's because there is. We're here to break down the latest on three core issues, and how President Biden is improving on his predecessor, but failing to live up to the transformative change we desperately need.
- **Pentagon Budget:** Though Biden's Pentagon budget request is likely to be no larger than Trump's, it's no smaller either.
- **Afghanistan withdrawal:** While Biden's promise to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by the end of the year is laudable, he has yet to prove that he's interested in challenging the endless war mindset that led us there in the first place.
- **The Iran Deal:** Late-breaking developments are giving us cause for optimism after the promise of a swift reentry to the Iran nuclear deal has faltered. It's time for Biden to go further.

On Pentagon Spending, Afghanistan, and Iran, Biden Must Go Bigger

President Biden took office with an historic opportunity: a chance to not only reverse the damage of four years of Trump's reckless incompetence, but to chart a new path from multiple decades of failed, military-first foreign policy. Two months in, where does he stand?

His response to three separate foreign policy questions this week paint a clear picture: across issues, Biden has offered meaningful progress from the Trump era — but that progress has been sluggish, inadequate, and out of touch with the pro-diplomacy majority.

Meet the New Pentagon Budget, Same As The Old Pentagon Budget

The Pentagon budget was dangerously out of control since well before Donald Trump took office. But that didn't stop Trump from inflating it even further, ultimately spending his way to an additional \$130+ billion (in non-inflation-adjusted terms), for an eye-popping \$740 billion budget in his final year in office. Next week, President Biden is expected to release his request for the 2022 fiscal year, and early reports indicate that his Pentagon ask will likely be... ~\$740 billion.

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A “flat” budget may be better than the recent history of ever-expanding Pentagon spending, but accepting Trump’s budget priorities as the new normal is far from the right path forward. As a deadly pandemic continues to claim lives around the globe, and with a shrinking window of opportunity to confront the climate crisis, we need to reject the absurd belief that funneling near-limitless sums into warmaking will keep us safe and instead reorient security spending towards the real 21st century drivers of insecurity. The majority of the public [recognizes](#) that it’s time to divest from war and invest in human needs. Will the Biden Administration?

Troops Out of Afghanistan... Tomorrow

President Biden has [predicted](#) that all U.S. troops will be out of Afghanistan by the end of the year. If true, that would certainly be welcome (if long overdue) news, and our movement will fight to hold him to it. But there’s still reason for concern.

To start, under an agreement signed with the Taliban last year, the United States is meant to fully withdraw by [May 1](#). While a few months of delay might not seem to be a big deal, it is a worrisome signal that the underlying endless war mindset — the belief that *if we would only stay at war for a little bit longer we might finally succeed* — remains unchallenged. Beyond that, a truly new approach to Afghanistan would not only withdraw U.S. and NATO forces, but would reject military solutionism altogether. But so far, there’s no clear commitment from Biden not to simply replace combat troops with an increased reliance on covert operations, private contractors, and drone warfare, and instead focus on diplomacy and Afghan-led solutions to the conflict.

The U.S. public is [tired](#) of endless war — and ending endless war means more than promises of eventual troop withdrawals. As necessary as those are, we need to totally rethink our approach, rejecting the military mindset and instead investing in long-term, multilateral and locally-led peacebuilding for sustainable peace, justice, and accountability.

A Breakthrough on Iran?

The Iran nuclear deal was a singular achievement of President Obama’s foreign policy, thawing tensions between two long-”enemies,” constraining the threat of nuclear warfare, and proving that multilateralism and diplomacy *work*. And it was working as intended until President Trump took office, reimposed suffocating blanket sanctions on the people of Iran, and unilaterally withdrew from the deal. That’s why then-nominee Biden made it an explicit campaign [promise](#) to reenter the deal, and why the Democratic Party [platform](#) full-throatedly endorsed a clean JCPOA re-entry. So what’s happened?

While President Biden has taken [small steps](#) toward re-engaging with Iran, his administration has downplayed the U.S.’ harmful role in why diplomacy with Iran is where it is, creating a logjam in negotiations. But, pressure from progressives and pro-diplomacy activists may be

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paying off: the Biden administration [announced](#) today that parties to the deal will meet in Vienna next week to discuss a path forward.

Given the potential of Iran's upcoming elections to stop any progress in its tracks, the next meeting raises the stakes. Failure to make progress risks becoming a death knell for U.S.-Iran diplomacy. Not to mention the fact that until sanctions are lifted, Iranians continue to suffer, and local changemakers continue to find their fights for a better Iran undermined.

We have been proud to help lead the pressure on the administration. This week, over 30 NGOs, led by the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), launched a [week of action](#) to #ReSealTheDeal. With petitions, phone campaigns, social media storms, political education events, and more, thousands of activists have called on President Biden to fulfill his own promise — and the demands of the pro-diplomacy [majority](#) — and rejoin the Iran deal before it's too late. This week of action follows [growing pressure](#) from progressive advocates and increasingly vocal [demands](#) from pro-peace leaders in Congress. Pressure on the Biden administration is building, but we can't let up yet.

Time for a New Approach

President Biden has made plenty of progress. But the urgency of the moment — and the opportunity at hand — demand much more. We must go further than incremental change and improvements on the disastrous Trump era. It's time to rethink the war-first status quo and finally put peace first.

BURIED LEDES

As if a deadly virus wasn't enough — **U.S. sanctions are [exacerbating the effects](#) of the pandemic** for everyday people across the world. Biden will review the impact of sanctions on covid relief, but he must go further to **ensure that all sanctions [do not harm regular civilians](#).**

From U.S. sanctions hindering countries from controlling covid, to Navy ships spreading the virus, to an arms race with China — **the pandemic has [made militarism worse](#).** Yet another reason 2020 was the #WorstYearEver. We're sorry for reminding you.

In a positive step towards de-escalating tensions with Iran — recklessly heightened by Trump — **the U.S. is [removing](#) some antimissile systems and military personnel from Saudi Arabia.** This drawdown must be paired with diplomacy, especially by rejoining the Iran Deal.

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46 per day — that's how many [bombs and missiles](#) the U.S. and its allies have dropped on other countries since 2001. It's time to get out of these endless wars and work to address the damage we've done.

In a move that will likely impede accurate reporting — **the military junta in Burma has imposed [an internet blackout](#)** after launching airstrikes against its population earlier this week. **Over 500 people have died, and thousands are attempting to [flee the country](#).**

The U.S. must end its complicity in the war in Yemen — and so should its allies. This week, **activists in Canada organized protests [blocking a rail route](#) used to ship weapons that are sold to Saudi Arabia.**

Checking another box off the “reverse Trump’s bad policies” list, Biden plans to [revoke sanctions](#) against the International Criminal Court for investigating U.S. torture in Afghanistan. If we expect accountability from others, we must hold ourselves to account, too.

The U.S. has been [funneling millions of dollars](#) towards violent groups in Iraq that it's also trying to fight. Turns out defense contractor Salyport has been doing deals with “death squads.” Smells like.... Corruption? *Gasp* From the military-industrial-complex? It *couldn't* be!

And finally, as Women’s History Month comes to a close, **celebrate women across the globe and bless your ears with this [Tiny Desk playlist](#).**