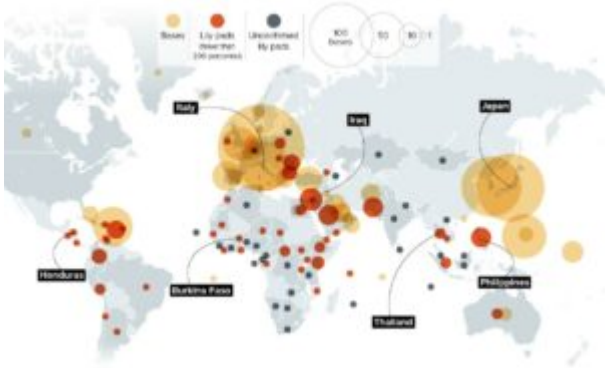
Trump Leaves Biden Foreign Policy Problems; How Will the Left React?

written by Dan La Botz | December 8, 2020



U.S. Military Bases Around the World

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When he became president, Donald Trump broke with what had been seventy years of post-war U.S. foreign policy. At the end of World War II, the United States government took on the roles of organizer of world capitalism, political leader of the capitalist bloc against the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, and military superpower with the ability to enforce its policies. All of that was based on a partnership with Western Europe and Japan and the subordination of the nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. While the American system had been breaking down for decades, when Trump took office he adopted a completely different approach, no less imperialist, but with a different method.

Trump promised his base that he would avoid foreign wars to carry out regime change and that he would "Make America Great Again," by taking on its enemies. Trump broke with America's Western European allies. He threatened to leave the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. He withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement. He withdrew the United States from the Iran deal. He left the U.N. Human Rights Council. And he later left the World Health Organization. Trump built sections of a wall at the U.S.-Mexican border to keep out Latino immigrants and banned immigrants from Muslim nations, while putting tariffs on Chinese goods.

At the same time Trump broke with the United Nations and recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel while his Secretary of State visited Israeli settlements occupied territories. Trump reimposed travel bans on Cuba but became the first U.S. president to meet with the leader of North Korea. Trump praised authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin of Russia, Xi Jinping of China, and Narendra Modi of India. All of these moves represented a fundamental break with traditional U.S. policies. And many of them failed to bring about any significant gains for the United States. Now in the last days of his presidency, having already withdrawn from Syria, he has ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Somalia, which analysts fear may lead to a resurgence of ISIS.

Joseph Biden, who takes office on January 20, wants to return to the traditional post-war arrangements and more specifically to the era of President Barack Obama under which he served as vice-president and from whose administration he has taken much of his cabinet. Biden wants to reestablish the U.S. partnership with Western Europe in part contain the growing economic power

of China. That's is a task made more difficult by China's recent negotiation of a trade pact with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam and other nations. In the Middle East, Trump had already ordered the killing of Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani, and Israel's murder of Iran's top nuclear scientist, likely approved by Trump, has created the possibility of a regional war. Biden, like Trump will want to maintain relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Arab Emirates, and Egypt, while trying to negotiate with and restrain Iran.

Biden says that, "The U.S. is back and ready to lead." While not especially hawkish, Biden supported George W. Bush's Iraq War, though he had reservations about Afghanistan. Still Biden is absolutely committed to U.S. domination of world affairs and the wars necessary to ensure that. Like Obama, Biden will probably attempt to use limited military actions and drones to carry out his objectives. But remember that the United States still has its Combat Command system, dividing the world into 11 regions, and within these regions the U.S. maintains 800 military bases, as well as the most powerful military in the world.

Since Obama's election in 2008 as a peace candidate, the United States has had no anti-war movement. Between then and now the American left has focused on domestic issues and the current situation—pandemic and an economic depression—make it likely that domestic issues will remain in the forefront. The left will have to rebuild an anti-war movement to resist Biden and to fight against U.S. imperialism, militarism and war when it erupts.