

Biden names national security team of right-wing militarists

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President-elect Joe Biden sent a clear message to the world and to the American people with the first announcement of the top appointees to his cabinet and White House staff: the number one priority of the incoming Democratic administration is to build a US-led front of imperialist powers in preparation for stepped up military pressure and outright war on Russia and China.

All six of the appointments announced Monday in press releases—the nominees themselves will be introduced to the public later today—are in the sphere of foreign policy and national security. All are veterans of the Obama-Biden administration, and many were confirmed in those earlier positions by a Republican-controlled Senate led by Mitch McConnell, demonstrating that Biden intends to form a government entirely acceptable to the Republican right.

The six officials named Monday include:

Antony Blinken, secretary of state: Blinken is a long-time Biden national security aide in both the US Senate and during Biden's vice presidency, and he was deputy secretary of state in 2015-2016.

Jake Sullivan, national security adviser: Sullivan succeeded Blinken as national security adviser to Vice President Biden, as well as serving as chief of staff to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Avril Haines, director of national intelligence: Haines was on Biden's staff at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then on the Obama-Biden National Security Council before serving two years as deputy director of the CIA in 2015-2016.

Alexander Mayorkas, secretary of homeland security: a Cuban-born son of immigrants, Mayorkas is a career domestic security official who was deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Obama administration, which deported more immigrants than any previous government.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, ambassador to the United

Nations: the highest ranking African American in the career foreign service, Thomas-Greenfield was named ambassador to Liberia by George W. Bush, then State Department personnel chief under Obama and later assistant secretary for African Affairs. She was forced out by Trump in 2017 and became a counselor with the Albright-Stonebridge Group, a foreign policy think tank for Democrats headed by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright.

John Kerry, special presidential envoy for climate: the former senator, presidential candidate and secretary of state, now 76, co-chaired Biden's climate change task force along with Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. He will head a US effort to rejoin the Paris climate accord.

The first and most obvious fact about all six nominees is that they are dedicated defenders of American imperialism and the interests of Wall Street. Several are multi-millionaires, while all are comfortably within the top tier financially. Blinken, for example, is the son of a founder of Warburg Pincus investment bank, Donald Blinken, who was for 12 years chairman of the board of the State University of New York.

For all the hosannas in the media over the "diversity" of these initial appointees—one African American, one Hispanic, two women—these facets of their identities are entirely irrelevant. It doesn't matter to the victim of torture in a CIA secret prison that the torturer (or her boss in Washington) is female. It doesn't matter to refugee children separated from their parents by immigration agents that the DHS secretary is Hispanic. It doesn't matter to the victims of US military aggression that the diplomat who defends this violence before the world is black.

The emphasis on diversity is used to distract from the reactionary character of the foreign policy orientation of the incoming Biden administration, which his apologists

seek to disguise using the skin color, gender and national origin of the personnel who will carry it out.

There has been little discussion in the media of the significance of Biden choosing, in the midst of a nationwide and worldwide public health catastrophe that has already taken the lives of a quarter million Americans, to announce his foreign policy team first. If victory over coronavirus was the number one priority, as Biden claimed during the fall campaign, why not announce those who will head up the Department of Health and Human Services and other agencies with the main responsibility for the fight against the pandemic?

This is a signal that the real point of difference between the Democrats and Trump is not his catastrophic performance in relation to COVID-19. While Trump now openly embraces “herd immunity” and dismisses the death toll as inconsequential, the Democrats will pursue essentially the same policy, and Biden has flatly rejected any new lockdown of the US economy.

Ever since Trump took office, the focus of Democratic Party opposition has been on foreign policy, particularly Trump’s allegedly “soft” line on Russia and his pullout, albeit largely rhetorical, from US commitments to Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Now that Biden expects to be in control of US foreign policy in less than 60 days, he is demonstrating that this will be the initial focus of policy changes.

Both major pro-Democratic Party newspapers emphasized this in their coverage of the Biden team’s rollout. The *Washington Post* wrote, “Biden is planning to prioritize foreign policy as a major pillar in his administration, with vows to reassemble global alliances and insert the United States into a more prominent position on the world stage.”

The *New York Times* was even blunter, identifying China as the main target of the new administration. In a front-page profile, the *Times* described Blinken as “a defender of global alliances” and said that he “will try to coalesce skeptical international partners into a new competition with China...” It identified trade in the Indo-Pacific region, technology investments, and Africa as areas in which the US would be “competing with China.”

Other profiles have noted that Blinken and Biden were generally aligned on foreign policy issues during the Obama administration, except on two occasions—the US attack on Libya, and US policy towards Syria—where Blinken favored more aggressive US intervention and Biden was more cautious.

The two were completely in step in relation to Ukraine,

where Blinken played a key public role in turning the Crimean secession and reunification with Russia into a major international crisis. Blinken was the main US spokesman advocating heavy sanctions on Russia, to punish not only the Putin government, but also the population of the country as a whole. In a speech at the time, he said sanctions were needed to “demonstrate to the Russian people that there is a very hefty fine for supporting international criminals like” Putin.

Of the other appointees, Avril Haines is also a close personal associate of Biden, serving on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when he was chairman, then moving to the National Security Council in the Obama-Biden White House before her two years at the CIA. After leaving the government when Trump came in, Haines joined Blinken at the newly formed WestExec Partners, a national security think tank peddling advice to US corporations. Another partner was Michele Flournoy, the former Pentagon official under Obama who is widely expected to be Biden’s choice as secretary of defense.

Late Monday, after the rollout of the group that Biden called the “crux” of his national security team, the Biden transition revealed that his next major cabinet pick would be former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen to serve as Treasury secretary. This underscores the absolute subservience of the incoming administration to Wall Street, since Yellen was identified with the Fed policy of unrestrained opening of the financial spigots to support the financial markets during the 2008-2009 Wall Street crash.

Yellen was a top Fed official from 2004 on, working with then-chairman Ben Bernanke, moving up to vice chair in 2009 and appointed by Obama to succeed Bernanke in 2013. Trump declined to reappoint her to a second term in 2017.



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