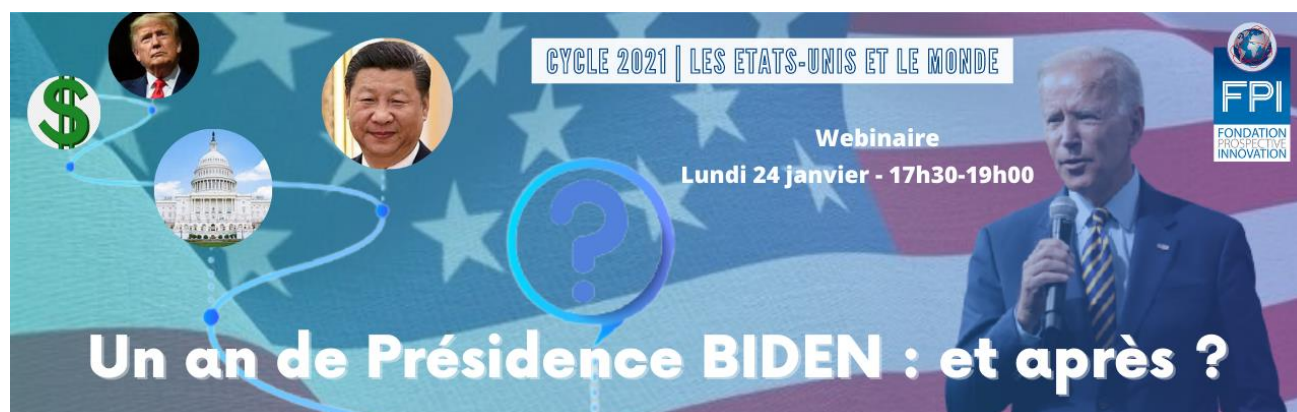


# Biden : One Year After

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I want to sincerely thank prime minister Jean Pierre Raffarin, Serge Degalaix, the whole team at FPI, and the editor, Philip Coste for publishing my book, *Toward an Alternative Transatlantic Strategy* to appear in February, and for inviting me to speak today.

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What Prime Minister Raffarin had argued in his February 2003 declaration to the French National Assembly—only a few weeks before the essentially unilateral US-led military intervention in Iraq in March—is just relevant today as it was back then:

“Multilateralism, which is synonymous with collective responsibility, is a moral necessity for democracies, but it is also a political necessity for the coherence and organization of international action.”<sup>1</sup>

In the contemporary geopolitical crisis, it is once again a moral and political necessity to engage in a truly concerted multilateral strategy with respect to ongoing conflicts between Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia, China and Taiwan, as well as between Russia and Ukraine, among many other conflicts that could further destabilize their respective regions—as did the US-led Iraq war whose devastating long-term impact has destabilized the wider Middle East.

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, February 2003 Declaration to the French National Assembly, « Le multilatéralisme qui est synonyme de responsabilité collective, de nécessité morale pour les démocraties, mais aussi nécessité politique pour la cohérence et l'organisation de l'action internationale. »

Although the US opted to engage in war against Iraq in 2003—rather than pursue an engaged multilateral approach as advocated by France that would have prevented war—a truly multilateral approach must not now fail to prevent the real prospects of major power war.

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Despite his promises of “multilateralism” and “relentless diplomacy,” Biden has followed through on a number of Trump’s unilateralist foreign policies. These include Biden’s version of Trump’s Peace through Strength doctrine, the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, as well as the US-UK-Australian nuclear submarine deal that has been aimed at countering China’s quest for regional hegemony by military means. In an act of unilateralism, the Biden administration pressed Australia to reject the already signed French non-nuclear diesel submarine deal.

Despite these unilateral actions, there are major differences between Trump and Biden. One difference is that while Trump engaged in threats, pressures and sanctions, and sometimes bullying American allies even more than US rivals, Biden has sought to co-opt US Allies into backing US foreign policy goals. Biden has promised to compromise on US-EU disputes over trade and subsidies, Boeing vs Airbus, for example. And unlike Trump, he intends to work through the World Trade Organization. Biden has also promised to work with the EU to help develop the new digital economy and green energy infrastructure.

At the same time, Biden has hoped to cooperate with US rivals—but only where US interests intersect with the interests of Russia, China, Iran and others. Here Biden has supported multilateral diplomacy in the difficult effort to reinstate the Iran nuclear accord, that had been dumped by Trump, while trying to bring Saudi Arabia and Iran into dialogue toward a non-aggression pact—in a thus far unsuccessful effort to wind down the Yemen war, for example.

With respect to China, Biden has sought dialogue over mutual environmental interests, while maintaining many of the sanctions that Trump had previously imposed, in addition to strengthening US defense supports for Taiwan. Biden has more strongly criticized China’s human rights abuses than did Trump.

With respect to Russia, Biden immediately revived the New Start strategic arms treaty before it had expired, and has sought a new treaty that will deal with cyber warfare and cyber criminality. By contrast, Biden has promised even stronger defense supports for Ukraine and even tougher international sanctions on Russia if Putin once again invades the country after he had annexed Crimea in 2014. Biden has more strongly backed NATO than did Trump.

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Key questions remain: Will Biden continue to pursue his own version of Trump's Peace through Strength doctrine that appears to be pressing Russia, China and Iran even closer together by tightening US alliances with NATO, Japan, India and Australia? Or will Biden be able to engage in a truly relentless and multilateral diplomacy that will prove flexible enough to achieve a modicum of peace—and hence attempt to splinter such an authoritarian Eurasian Axis?

Despite strong divisions between Republicans and Democrats over domestic priorities, there is a general bipartisan consensus that the U.S. needs to engage in an even tougher defense and security policy against US authoritarian rivals, Russia, China and Iran—instead of engaging in deconfliction, de-escalation and arms control and arms elimination in addition to geopolitical and economic compromises.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Biden had initially proposed a 2022 National Defense Authorization Act spending bill that was larger than Trump's previous defense bill. Yet Congress itself boosted the same defense bill with even more funding above Biden's initial proposals—with only a few Senators and members of the House opposing. One purported reason for the significant increase in defense spending was the angry response of Congress to the announcement that China had tested a new hypersonic weapon.

Much like previous defense authorization bills, the final version of the 2022 NDAA bill that Congress passed seeks to restrict executive action with respect to US policies toward China and Taiwan<sup>3</sup>, Russia and Crimea<sup>4</sup>, potentially making it more difficult for the President to engage in a more flexible diplomacy. Congress could also oppose a Biden-negotiated Iran nuclear deal that would make assurances, as Iran has demanded, that the US would never again drop out of the Iran nuclear accord once it signed the agreement—as Trump did.

Such militarism was further indicated by Congressional proposals in both the Senate and House versions of the 2022 NDAA that would make it mandatory for women to register for a potential military draft, as is the case for men today, without even first passing the Equal Rights Amendment. Even though this measure did not enter into the

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<sup>2</sup> The House passed the NDAA measure 363-70 shortly after the bill was introduced, the Senate passed the measure 89-10 on December 15, 2021 and the President signed the bill into law on December 27.

<sup>3</sup> With respect to China, the 2022 NDAA states that the United States must maintain the military capabilities to resist a takeover or blockade against Taiwan while providing Taiwan with asymmetrical military capabilities in the process of developing a new global strategy to deal with China.

<sup>4</sup> With respect to Russia, the 2022 NDAA places a limit on military cooperation between the United States and the Russian Federation, prohibits the use of funds for any activity that recognizes the sovereignty of the Russia over Crimea, and strengthens Ukraine Security Assistance, while expressing "ironclad" US Congressional support for NATO.

final 2022 NDAA bill, the mere proposal of a possible draft for both men and women symbolizes the preparation for war.

While it has been argued that Putin's militarization is designed to keep himself in power, this bipartisan Congressional militarism not-so-differently appears to represent a desperate means to unify a highly divided and polarized American society (even if the proposed draft for women, and not for men only, could prove socially divisive). There is consequently a real danger that heightened international tensions, involving the threat of war, could be used as a means for Putin to sustain himself in power and for the US Presidency to sustain American social and political unity.

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The concern raised here is that bipartisan Congressional efforts to limit US diplomatic flexibility, coupled with the strong support of Congress for NATO, could prevent full consideration of a range of options such as the French, German and European Union rapprochement with Moscow, as proposed by French President Macron, that is aimed at establishing a new European security order.<sup>5</sup>

Such a potential EU-Russian rapprochement could lead to the formation of a neutral, decentralized, and non-nuclear Ukraine that would in turn negotiate its disputes over the Donbass and Crimea with Russia in the Normandy or another OSCE-backed multilateral format. A truly neutral Ukraine, with its disputed borders protected by international peacekeepers under a general OSCE mandate, for example, would be closer to achieving the neutral position that Kiev originally demanded when it declared independence in 1991.

This approach has its historical parallel with the multilateral Austrian neutrality treaty which the US, Soviet Union, France and the UK negotiated in the period 1945 to 1955, that had required the removal of US and Soviet forces in exchange for an Austrian declaration of neutrality.

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As President Macron has urged, such a European-led rapprochement with Moscow would require the strengthening of European political unity and defense capabilities. Yet such an approach would also require the backing of the US and NATO in a geopolitical situation in which the refusal to engage in a settlement with Russia over

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<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Macron au Parlement européen à Strasbourg : « Nous devons le construire entre Européens, puis le partager avec nos alliés dans le cadre de l'Otan, puis ensuite le proposer à la négociation à la Russie... La sécurité de notre continent nécessite un réarmement stratégique de notre Europe comme puissance de paix et d'équilibre, en particulier dans le dialogue avec la Russie" »

Ukraine is more due to hubris, or excessive pride—than it is due to the perceived Russian threat.

The dilemma is that ever since NATO promised membership for Ukraine and Georgia at the 2008 Bucharest summit, and after the US had overruled the French and German position against Ukraine’s eventual membership, the US and NATO have been reluctant to make an about face and alter their position. This is true even if Ukraine, as Biden himself has recently admitted as his press conference, is far from being ready to join NATO.<sup>6</sup> And there is no way NATO itself should be put in the provocative position of defending undefined Ukrainian-Russian boundaries and waterways.

Both the proposed 2008 NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia, combined with EU proposals for an Eastern Partnership with former Soviet bloc states, also including Ukraine and Georgia, were seen by Moscow as an effort to establish a NATO-EU sphere of influence directly on Russian borders—thereby sparking the 2014 Russian backlash. The dilemma is that the US and NATO now appear even more reluctant to compromise in the face of Putin’s demands. Russia is using military threats to Ukraine as a means to press NATO to return to its original 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act just prior to the enlargement process into eastern Europe. That Founding Act had promised to “build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security.”

In Moscow’s view it was NATO that took the first step in violating the 1997 Founding Act by engaging in the War over Kosovo in 1999 that was not fought with a UN Security Council mandate, and was thus seen as “illegal” in Russian and Chinese eyes. Russia also saw NATO’s 2008 Bucharest Summit as violating the spirit of the Founding Act by announcing that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join NATO without Russia’s input in the matter.

From the US point of view, it was Russia that had violated the Founding Act (as well the 1994 Budapest Accord among other treaties) after its annexation of Crimea in 2014. In effect, Russia engaged in an “illegal” act of preclusive imperialism in the effort to prevent Ukraine from entering NATO that, it was feared by Moscow, would then permit NATO to control the Black Sea from the geostrategic position of Sevastopol against Moscow’s perceived vital interests—including its regional trade and energy routes.

Two wrongs—Kosovo and Crimea—do not make a right.

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<sup>6</sup> In his January 19, 2022 press conference, Biden stated, “the likelihood that Ukraine is going to join NATO in the near term is not very likely, based on much more work they have to do in terms of democracy... and whether or not the major allies in the West would vote to bring Ukraine in right now. So there’s room (for Putin) to work if he wants to do that.”

Ironically enough, it is Trump, who was previously regarded in the media as being “pro-Russia,” who is now playing the “anti-Russia” card by arguing that Biden gave a “green light” for Putin to invade Ukraine during Biden’s January press conference.<sup>7</sup> Trump’s criticism then led Biden to reiterate his warning that any Russian troop movement into Ukraine would be taken as an invasion, and would be met with a “severe and coordinated economic response.”

Even though Trump lost the presidency, Trump and Trumpists have not left the American scene and have been trying to push Biden into taking a tougher stance toward Russia, China and Iran. The danger is that Trump is not only seeking to undermine Biden’s leadership, but that he, and his followers, also want to strengthen the power of executive branch over both the legislative and judicial branches in the formation of a new form of American authoritarianism.

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In addition to accusing Biden of being weak on Russia in their effort to win the US midterm elections, Trump and the Republicans have accused Biden for appearing weak over issues such as Biden’s disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan and the surge of illegal migrant crossings at the southern border—even though the Trump presidency itself was largely responsible for failing to deal effectively with both these issues.

One of the proposals of my new book, *Toward an Alternative Transatlantic Strategy*, is that the US and EU not only need to work together through UN-backed Contact Groups in the effort to prevent regional and major power conflict, but they also need to work together through Contact Group and multilateral assistance in the effort to stem the tide of migration from instable and undeveloped countries, including Afghanistan and the wider Middle East, into Europe, and from Latin America and Asia into the United States.

Here, the US and EU can implement what I call “regional peace and sustainable development communities” in cooperation with both Russia and China and the states of each region concerned under a general UN or OSCE mandate.

Given the fact that unauthorized and illegal migration represents a major issue fueling the rise of xenophobic and authoritarian movements in the US and Europe, stemming “excessive” migration through substantial EU and US development assistance that builds truly sustainable regional peace communities not only represents one way to prevent regional conflicts from widening, but it can also more indirectly stem the tide of domestic xenophobic movements that could soon splinter the European Union—if

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<sup>7</sup> [Donald Trump Says Joe Biden's Remarks Gave Russia the 'Green Light' on Ukraine](#)

not put an end to the present American form of democracy much as I forewarned in my book, *World War Trump*.

Both the US and EU need to thoroughly reform their very different forms of democracy so as to implement stricter term limits, engage in multiple option voting, permit greater degrees of popular participation in governance at all levels, including greater degrees of political power-sharing and workplace co-management, among other proposals. Full-fledged Transatlantic cooperation can furthermore permit the European Union and the US to boost their industrial and financial capabilities, strengthen their systems of social security and health care, significantly reduce wealth inequities, while concurrently working together to develop a new green infrastructure so as to better tackle the global environmental crisis.

The task is formidable, but not insurmountable.

## **Biography of the author**

Professor Hall Gardner is Full Professor and Former Chair (1993 to 2019) of the Department of History and Politics at the American University of Paris.

He is the author of IR Theory, Historical Analogy and Major Power War (*New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2019*); World War Trump: The Risks of America's New Nationalism (*New York: Prometheus Books, 2018*); Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History (*New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2015*); NATO Expansion and the U.S. Strategy in Asia: Surmounting the Global Crisis (*New York: Palgrave/Macmillan 2013*); Averting Global War (*New York: Palgrave/Macmillan 2007*), among many others

His next book, *Toward an Alternative Transatlantic Strategy* is to be published in February 2022 by the Fondation Prospective Innovation in Paris.