



## Inauguration of the Biden Administration and ROK-U.S. Relations

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The U.S. President Joe Biden began his term as the 46th president after his inauguration on January 20. Biden was elected as a president in an election held amidst unprecedented chaos and conflict in history, but Biden's future is in a thorny path, as reflected in Trump's supporters' intrusion of the U.S. Capitol. And President Trump became the first disgraced president in the U.S. history to be impeached a second time during his term charged with inciting insurrection by encouraging his supporters to storm the Capitol.

The Biden administration is expected to begin its term either with "dismantling Trump's legacy" or "anyone but Trump (ABT)" to fix the negative legacies of the era of Trump. Major achievements in domestic policy of the Trump administration include corporate tax cuts, deregulation, and economic boom in domestic policies. Additionally, concerning foreign policy, major achievements are made in blocking China's offensive, amendment of trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (the current United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, USMCA), supporting Ukraine against Russia's offensive, and normalizing Israeli-Arab relations. Despite these achievements, however, failures are more prominent in Trump's four-year legacy.

First, it brought failure of democracy. President Trump's populism, disobedience to the presidential election, and incitement to riot caused immense losses that are hard to be recovered for the U.S.'s soft power, which used to be a model country for democracy. As a result, this has not only undermined the legitimacy and persuasion of U.S. diplomacy to support the establishment of democracy in the future, but also caused the Democratic Summit, which President Biden vowed to hold within his first year in office, has been greatly tarnished. Second, the failure of the COVID-19 response

can be cited. The world's only superpower, the U.S., gained dishonorable records considering the world's largest number of infections, the highest death toll and the highest infection rate of COVID-19. Third, the shrinking of the U.S. leadership was caused by continuing a rather inconsistent diplomacy under the American first strategy during Trump's term. Until the end of his term, Trump administration designated Iran-backed Houthi rebels as terrorist organizations in Yemen, lifted restrictions on contact between the U.S. and Taiwanese officials, and re-designated Cuba as a sponsor state of terrorism. All of this has contributed to build a minefield that the Biden administration should carefully avoid.

In his inaugural address, Biden stressed "unity." This reflects that the biggest legacy left by President Trump's four years: the division of the U.S. politics and conflict, and regression of democracy. President Biden declared that "Democracy has prevailed" as the President Trump's attempt in denying the election results and instigating the Capitol riot ended in failure. Regarding the U.S.'s domestic and international turmoil, including COVID-19, President Biden stressed to overcome the current challenges and crises through national unity by quoting the Bible, 'Weeping may spend the night, but there is joy in the morning' (Psalm 30:50). He also declared that he would cooperate with the world under the U.S.'s close observation and restore the relations with its allies. In addition, he stressed that the U.S. will lead the world not as "an example of power", but as "a power of example."

As previously declared, President Biden signed 17 executive orders and Memorandums that reversed the Trump administration's policies on the first day of his inauguration. These measures include mandatory mask policies, rejoining the World Health Organization, establishment of a COVID-19 Coordinator, extension of Pandemic eviction, extension of student loan repayment freeze, re-joining the Paris Convention, cancellation of Keystone Pipeline permits, dissolving the 1776 Commission<sup>1)</sup> and publishing a draft of Recommendation to achieve racial equality.

In addition, Biden administration took other actions to cover inclusion of foreigners in population census, maintaining Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), ending travel ban to certain Islamic states, improving immigration management policies, suspending construction of border barriers, extending the deportation ban on Liberians, prohibition of racial discrimination at workplace, and improving regulatory review procedures.

However, it still remains uncertain how much success the "unity" that Biden calls for will pay off. In his inauguration speech, President Biden said the American way to go is national unity and that "the 'uncivil war' between Blue and Red, urban and

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1) The 1776 Commission was established by President Trump as an advisory body for patriotic education, by defining the anti-racism protests as "leftists riots and chaos" and called it the "direct result of decades of left-wing brainwashing at schools."

rural, conservatives and progressives should end as soon as possible." However, it is not easy to overcome the aftermath of Trumpism and draw cooperation from Republicans. The Republicans have already launched an offensive against the Biden's immigration reform plan. In addition, other issues are expected to continue to clash between the Democratic and Republican parties to include the reestablishment of the U.S. identity, affirmative action on minority ethnic groups, suspension of corporate tax cuts, and political correctness.

With the beginning of the Biden era, attention is being paid on how it will differentiate itself from the Trump era. The two pillars of Biden's foreign policy can be summarized as "multilateralism and values," and "normative diplomacy." Multilateralism includes respect for and the return to international institutions and organizations, and strengthening cooperation with the U.S.'s allies and partners. It includes President Biden's strategy that twist from the policies of President Trump's American first strategy, such as vow to rejoin the Paris Climate Change Convention, review of rejoining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and review of Iran's return to Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Value and norm diplomacy includes values and norms, such as democracy, human rights, and strengthening the rule-based trade order, which are a reversal of the transactional relationship that President Trump stressed. As a result, it is foreseeable that the conflict and antagonism of the international order, and the individual ways to survive in self-help amidst the harsh national interest based war caused by the Trump era, will be eased to certain extent.

What implications does the Biden administration's diplomatic stance have for the ROK-U.S. alliance? ROK, in particular, will have to answer two questions raised by the Biden era. First question is how to live up to the Biden's presidency norms and values diplomacy. In the Biden era, there will be fewer conflicts due to pending alliance issues, such as sharing defense costs compared to the Trump era. However, the U.S.'s calls for ROK to keep pace with the "value-oriented" agenda-setting are expected to increase. One of the pressing issues will concern DPRK human rights, such as banning the distribution of anti-Pyongyang leaflets. Second, it is important how much the ROK will cooperate with the network of the allies and partners that the U.S. values. Kurt Campbell, a former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, who is known to have been nominated for the "Asian Tsar" of the Biden administration, said in a recent Foreign Affairs article that to cope with the China's challenge, it requires a coalition with allies and partners. The extension preached the need for the D-10 Group, a coalition of democratic states. In the Post-COVID-19 era, the pace of response is expected to become as critical as multilateral cooperation. That's why "mission-driven coalition" among few countries that have a good will has become more important than international organizations that feature slow decision-making and poor drive, and D-10 is often mentioned instead of G-20.

Now the Trump era is over and a new day in the United States has dawned. As a result, new opportunities and challenges will be created not only in the world order, but also in the ROK-U.S. relations. Moon Jae-in administration also reorganized foreign and security lines to align with the Biden administration. It is time for a close analysis of the changes of the Biden administration in policy direction and establishes new policies in the Korean government. When it continues adhering to its passive foreign policy restricted by relations with China and DPRK and neglecting to analyze changes that would begin in Washington, Moon Jae-in administration will continue to suffer from repeating uncomfortable scenes throughout remainder of his term. ❖

※ *Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

※ *This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.*