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**Democrats and Republicans
Differences in Critical Issues**

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United States' administrations for decades have always been involved in the Middle East. The region has and remains a place for the U.S. to achieve its national interests and to display its power as a global force in the international system. However, the extent to which the U.S. role as the world's strongman is currently debated. The previous republican U.S. administration represented a shift in U.S. foreign policy with 'America First' strategy. Also, as it was identified in the previous report issued by FDHRD "An Insight into the Democrats' Counterterrorism Policy", the current administration takes a different course in dealing with the Middle East.

The new democrats' administration strategy shifts its focus to Europe and the Indo-Pacific rather than the Middle East. The released statements and endorsed policies by the new government reveal how the U.S. is reversing the previous republican administration policies and redefining the state's national priorities and security threats.

As the new administration is implementing a more collaborative and traditional strategy unlike the previous republican administration nationalistic approach, the Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue issues a report that focus on the different policies and stances of the current democrat and the previous republican administration on critical issues. The report shed the light on the different approaches and policies implemented by the two administrations in each of the following issues; Syria, human rights, refugees, Turkey, and Libya.

The report reveals that the democrat administration policies aim to maintain U.S. interests, restore its power in the international system and reassert U.S. core values by strengthening U.S. partnerships, rule of law, and human rights values. On the contrary, the republican administration was guided by a clear realist approach that worked to maintain U.S. national interests over American values, human rights and shared interests.

Syria

The mass demonstrations that started in 2011 in Syria against the Syrian President Bashar Al Assad has alternated to a civil war and a struggle among religious, ethnic factions, and foreign players. The civil war has internationalized with the intervention of foreign actors in the conflict either directly or through proxies.

Whether the current democrats' administration will fulfil its National Interim Strategy by shifting the focus of its foreign policy from the Middle East to other regions or by using the diplomatic approach instead of the use of force or not, the United States have its own strategic schemes which will always have a way of pulling America back on the grounds. For instance, Biden's policies so far have highlighted the government's will to focus on other regions than the middle east, limit the use of force and resort to the diplomatic approach; however, Biden last month became the sixth consecutive U.S. president to bomb a Middle East target, hitting an Iranian backed militia in Syria.

There are deeply held convictions on defense and use of military force that have persisted in the democrats approach since the Vietnam War. These beliefs are undoubtedly evident in Joe Biden current administration. The democrats have a more of an expansive policy that prioritizes domestic issues, limits military spending, and arms control unlike the republicans. Democrats also work toward strengthening partnerships and coalitions with allies to work collectively, while republicans are more in favor to work unilaterally. These beliefs are manifested in the current administration implemented policies.

Biden is seeking to minimize the military role of the U.S. in the Middle East through a different course than the previous administration, by using a combination of soft and hard power without diminishing the role of the U.S. as an international super power and a mediator. The strikes by the U.S. new government are a message to the regional and international players in Syria, to outline that the U.S. will remain the main player in the region and its military presence in Syria will continue as long as instability remains in the country.

Syria was the recipient of Biden's first military operation in the Middle East. In February 2021, Joe Biden ordered for airstrikes in facilities in Eastern Syria targeting what he described as "Iran backed militias" as a military response to the rocket attacks against U.S targets in Iraq. Biden said "I directed this military action to protect and defend our personnel and our partners against these attacks and future such attacks". Adding, "I directed this military action consistent with my responsibility to protect United States citizens both at home and abroad and in furtherance of United States national security and foreign policy interests, pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct United States foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive".

Syria has been the battlefield for rival regional and international players with conflicting interests. As the U.S. tries to break away from the conflicts in the Middle East, the Biden administration remains mulling over the role of America in Syria. The administration has done little publicly so far on Syria unlike Yemen and Iran's nuclear program that were set out as main U.S. priorities in the Middle East.

In 2019, before Biden's inauguration as a president, Biden criticized the republican president's foreign policy for giving up on U.S. allies by withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria and giving ISIS "a new lease on life". Biden lamented the Trump administration for creating a humanitarian crisis in Syria, by forcing the U.S. military troops into retreat, and leaving the space for Turkey to invade the country including the territory held by the Kurds and for the Russians to increase their influence.

The current democrat's government is trying to manage the mess left by the previous administration; however, it's impossible to make Syria now an operational priority for the U.S. due to U.S concentration on issues of higher priority.

In the defense area, the democrats are more interested in using diplomatic approach as a first option and then using military force as second option, as a mean to avoid overseas intervention. Biden has signaled U.S. first diplomatic efforts by supporting the UN led talks in 2021 to promote a political settlement to end the conflict in Syria. However, as the current administration puts human rights as a key priority in its agenda, the government has refused to both lift sanctions on Syria and to provide aid for its reconstruction.

The new democrat government has not yet presented a clear policy or strategy to the Syrian crisis, whereby Biden is taking a precautionary approach in dealing with Syria, ensuring the adherence to the democrat's core human rights value while simultaneously countering Russia's growing global influence. Until the government forms a clear strategy, Washington will continue the implementation of the Caesar Act, which is a U.S. legislation sanction on the Syrian government to pressure the Syrian president to reach a solution with his opponents. Some officials currently call in Biden to scale up the Caesar Act and add other sanctions.

In contrast, the republicans approach on the area of defense and use of military force is usually conceived to be more firm than the democrats; they are more concerned with overseas security threats more than the democrats and broadly support an aggressive approach toward terrorism.

Unlike Biden's administration which marks terrorism as a non-existential threat, Trump's administration reflected on countering terrorism as a main national priority to the U.S. The Trump administration focused on the Middle East and referred to the threat posed by Jihadists and terrorist groups. He referred to Syria as a battlefield for terrorist groups, saying "We crushed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorists on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, and will continue pursuing them until they are destroyed".

U.S. under the Trump administration was directly involved in Syria; the main focus was to undermine Bashar al Assad regime and to destroy ISIS. However, Trump calls regional allies and partners to carry the regional security burden of the crisis and war.

In 2018 the administration announced its efforts to oust Bashar, and counter Iran backed militias in Syria and fight ISIS. Later, Trump ordered the military to prepare planning for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, urging allies to bear the expenses and the costs of reconstruction. Adapting a realist approach, the previous republican administration foreign policy was guided by a clear articulation to maintain U.S. national interests. Trump said "Only fight in wars in which the US has a clear national interest and path to victory; otherwise, let others fend for themselves". Trump's aversion to military intervention in the Middle East was very obvious during his administration and was even criticized by republican's officials.

Trump 'America First' foreign policy doctrine carved up America's military involvement abroad, as the president doesn't want to deploy American troops or spend billions of dollars in foreign conflicts unless it's in the mere benefit of the United States national interests. Both Trump and

Biden want to limit the use of military force abroad; however, the democrat administration feels the responsibility to step up and support their partners and allies as part of U.S. reputation.

Human Rights

Promoting Human rights has been deemed a priority in U.S. national security strategies. U.S. used its status as a hegemon to promote the idea of universal human rights. However, there is a clear difference between the democrats and the republicans' administrations' policies in supporting and advocating for Human Rights. Biden as a democrat has emphasized on the importance of shared values between states, unlike Trump who emphasized on the pursuit of national interest over shared values.

In his campaigns and after his inauguration, President Biden has reassured to implement policies to support human rights. The democrat president advocating efforts to human rights are evident in his the new criminal justice system, which work to address disparities based on race and gender, abolish the death penalty and decriminalize the use of cannabis.

Also as part of Biden's foreign policy, the new president want to modernize the immigration system that has been chaotic under the previous administration; he is also working toward improving the inequalities faced by women in any form of discrimination, sexism, abuse, or education.

The current administration puts human rights in the foreground of its agenda, as it is emphasized in the Interim Strategy. The new government also emphasize on the need to push back countries that normalize repression and restrict freedoms, referring to authoritarian states policies like Russia and China.

Moreover, before the Trump administration, the United States supported the advancement of human rights through the engagement in multilateral talks, institutions such as the United Nations, and funding in order to promote human rights domestically and prohibit U.S. assistance to abusive foreign countries. However, President Donald Trump failed to uphold U.S. traditional efforts to secure and promote human rights.

During his first term as a president, Trump has downplayed human rights. The administration emphasized on U.S. economic and military interests by developing ties with authoritarian leaders and human rights abusers in the sake of achieving U.S. national interests. The 'America First' doctrine was tailored by the republican president on securing U.S. national interests on the expense of human rights. According to the democrats, Trump administration's approach emboldened opponents of human rights and undermined the nation's moral standing and international image.

Refugees

Whether the U.S. has a responsibility to accept refugees or not has been an ongoing debate between the republicans and the democrats. Republicans constitute immigration as a critical national threat to the country's national interests, whereby republicans opposes decisions to accept more refugees to makes U.S. safer for its citizens. On the other hand, the democrats do not consider immigration as a critical threat; rather democrats are more likely to implement less strict immigration policies and find it as a responsibility to aid refugees fleeing violence in contrary to the republicans.

"Today, our immigration system is under greater stress as a direct result of Trump's misguided policies", Biden said. The current democrat administration focuses on reversing the previous administration policies on immigration, by easing the restrictions on immigration and stopping the construction on the border wall with Mexico, eliminating the practice of family separations at U.S. border, removing the ban on people from Muslim majority country traveling to the U.S. The government is also working to expand resources to immigrants already residing in the United States.

The democrat administration works toward reasserting U.S. core values and its commitment to asylum seekers and refugees, reforming the immigration system, welcoming immigrants' communities and implementing border screening. The administration has also proposed several initiatives aimed to support the immigrants living in the U.S. through the federal government's task force through the creation of local offices of immigrant affairs and informational hubs across the country.

As part of the current government agenda to help and support refugees as part of restoring humanity and American values, Biden submitted a proposal in January 2021 to allow more new immigrants in the U.S, raising the number of refugees brought into the country to 125,000 per year. The legislation tackles multiple schemes, it modernizes the immigration system, works toward ending family separations, address the root causes of migration and ensure U.S. remains a safe place for refugees fleeing persecution.

On the other hand the republican's previous administration considered immigrants and refugees as critical threats to the nation state, which have been elevated and manifested in the government strict policies. The Trump administration endorsed the Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy (RAISE) Act in August 2017. The act limits the number of refugees admitted annually to the U.S. 50,000 per year; it eliminates the diversity immigrant visa category, and reduces the number of family sponsored immigrants. Amid the pandemic, the government has suspended the entry of immigrants to the U.S. in almost all categories in fear of concerns of presenting risk to the labor market during the crisis.

Trump has also issued an executive order to construct a border wall to obtain control on the US-Mexico border. Another executive order by the republican president was to increase the construction of detention facilities near the southern border and increased the detention of immigrants as well as limiting access to asylum. According to the republicans, the Trump administration and the executive orders on refugees will make the US more secure from immigrants.

For the democrats the previous administration orders and policies turn its back on the U.S. heritage as an immigrant nation and a safe haven for the world's most persecuted people. Democrats argue that the previous administration policies has inflicted U.S. ability to influence other nations to collaborate with it on humanitarian initiatives, hindered US influence in the international scheme and harmed U.S. relations with its allies.

Turkey

The U.S. Turkey friendship relations date back to 1831, when the U.S. established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. When dealing with Turkey, it is important to point that Turkey is a key NATO Ally, where it is in the interest of both countries to anchor in the Euro-Atlantic Community. However, the relations between Turkey and its western allies in the U.S. and Europe have been declining for several years.

Looking ahead for Joe Biden's presidential term, it appears that Washington will have a tougher line with Turkey. Unlike Trump, Biden calls Erdogan an "autocrat" who should "pay a price" for the repression he caused, and before his inauguration he suggested that "U.S. should support Turkish opposition leaders to be able to take on and defeat Erdogan. Not by a coup, but by the electoral process".

The first flashpoint and indicator in the deteriorating relations between U.S. and Turkey in the current administration is Biden's fulfillment of his pledge by calling 1915 Armenian massacre "genocide". The White House declared on Saturday 24th of April, 2021 that the 1915 massacre of the Armenians under the Ottoman Empire constituted genocide. President Joe Biden became the first president of the United States of America to officially recognize the massacre as genocide and signals his commitment to human rights. The declaration has infuriated Turkey and led to more tensed relations

As a democrat, Biden will be consistent with human rights and democracy in his agenda. Unlike Trump, the new administration will raise human rights, and rule of law as main issues in dealing with Turkey or any other authoritarian state that pays no respect to U.S. held norms and values.

On the other hand, the election of Donald Trump marked a new era in the relationship between U.S. and Turkey. The personal ties between Erdogan and Trump have upstaged the institutional ties in bilateral relations.

This dynamic was visible in Trump two main announcements. The withdrawal of U.S. forces in Northern Syria in 2019, which gave a green light to Turkey to conduct military operations against the Syrian Kurdish groups, Washington closest ally in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria. It was also visible in Trump's refusal to levy sanctions on Turkey's purchase of Russian air defense system. However, after criticism from both republicans and democrats as well as pressure from the congress, Trump has imposed sanctions on Turkey in retaliation for its decision to buy Russian missiles.

Despite the high tension in the U.S. Turkish relations, Trump publicly called Erdogan as a 'great NATO ally and strategic partner', despite Turkey's attacking U.S. key partner, the Syrian Kurds.

Trump presidential term has represented a confused interlude in the U.S. Turkish Ties. The republican president has shielded Erdogan several times from sanctions enforcement. Also, both leaders strong personal ties made the U.S. president to circumvent policies of U.S administration in favor of the relation between the two countries.

Libya

Like Syria, Libya has become a battlefield for the interests of international actors. Even though Biden has done very little in foreign policy as he has only taken office in January 2021, his attitude and the posture of U.S. leadership in the Middle East and North Africa are obvious. The current democrat administration not only aims to defend democracy and human rights, but also to retain U.S. position in the international system.

The U.S Department of State under Biden's administration reveals U.S. stance and commitment to ensure a stable Libya. The U.S Department of State states that U.S. will cooperate with international partners and will work to end Libya's ongoing conflict through mediation efforts under the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

In January 2021, U.S called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian and Turkish military forces and mercenaries from Libya. The call marks the firm approach of U.S. policy toward Libya under Joe Biden to back a peaceful solution with respect to the Libyan sovereignty.

In addition, the new administration of the U.S has decided to extend the national emergency for Libya for one year, as President Joe Biden declared that Libya poses "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States" adding that the U.S. has

also to take the necessary measures to protect Libya from persons or associates trying to hinder Libyan national reconciliation.

On one hand, Biden is forgoing political and diplomatic involvement through multilateral, bilateral talks and use of soft power as a part of a broader strategy. On the other hand, Trump's administration policy in Libya was marked by disengagement.

Trump had a noninterventionist policy. Like his policies in Syria, Trump stepped back from involving in Libya's civil war aligning with his policy "America First" that advocates for disengagement from overseas conflict and to only intervene when it is in America's interests, while telling leaders to fend themselves. Trump stance on Libya differed than the democrats as he was against the American led coalition intervention in Libya; he argued that the Middle East would have been better if Gadhafi was still in power.

Trump administration had a passive approach to Libya, where the administration left the political scene to regional and international players, namely Egypt, Turkey and Russia. However, with the 2021 new American leadership, U.S will probably reassert its influence. As Biden vowed to counter Russian and Chinese increased influence, Libya constitutes a point of contention where U.S can address Russia's entrenched influence and reassert U.S. power. However, it's unclear how far will the democrat administration involve in the torn country.

Concluding Remarks

The report demonstrates the democrats' current administration as well as the previous republican's administration policies and stances on multiple issues that deem important in the current moment. Accordingly, the Forum for Development and Human Rights observes the following:

Given the short period of Biden's presidency so far, FDHRD observes that Washington is baffled either having a more firm approach in regards to the Syrian crisis to fill the void that has been filled by the Russians or to adhere to the new administration agenda by limiting the use of military force and counter Russian and Chinese influence elsewhere in Asia Pacific. Thus far, Biden is aligning to the democrats approach and convictions on defense and use of military force, where he is taking a precautionary approach, by ensuring the adherence to the democrats' core human rights value while simultaneously countering Russia growing influence.

Drawing on the similarities between the current democrat administration and the previous republican administration, both agreed on limiting military intervention in Syria and sought the support of the United Nation and regional allies to find a political solution to the Syrian Crisis. Both administrations don't want to lead the operation to reconstruct Syria. However, the two administration stances about the military presences of U.S. troops are not the same. Trump

ordered the withdrawal of troops from Syria while Biden on the other hand found that keeping a small force in Syria is necessary in order to prevent ISIS from resurging once more and protect the Kurds who supported U.S. military forces in strikes .


In regards to the case of human rights, Joe Biden, unlike the previous administration, view migration as a cornerstone in U.S. history as a migrant nation. The administration gives attention and tends to have a more inclusive policy that entails the rights of refugees and minorities. For the republicans, the stance on immigration is very clear. Immigration constitutes a national security threat to the state which requires strict immigration enforcement policies. In contrast, Biden's administration find immigration as a tool to both increase the state's economic growth and spread its core values and norms. Biden has a more moderate approach toward refugees and migrants while the previous administration had a very firm and aggressive stance.

The report also draws on the clear difference between the democrats and the republicans' positions on human rights whether on a domestic or international level. The Trump administration prioritized strengthening economic relations with authoritarian leaders without addressing human rights issues. In contrast, President Joe Biden has chosen to place human rights in the forefront. Based on his actions so far, Biden is uncomfortable to work with states or partners who do not share the same values as the U.S. in regards to the respect of human rights and international law. Biden stressed on shared values, unlike republicans whom emphasis on the pursuit of national interest over shared values.

U.S relations with Turkey have been deteriorating for several years. The current administration is having a tougher line with Turkey, unlike the previous administration. The new administration is raising human rights and rule of law as main elements in dealing with Turkey as an autocratic state that pays no respect to U.S. held norms and values. On the other hands, Trump favored economic bilateral relations over publicly admonishing and criticizing Turkey's human rights violations.

In Libya, Biden's administration reveals U.S. stance and commitment to ensure a stable Libya. U.S. stresses on cooperating with international partners to end Libya's ongoing conflict through mediation efforts. U.S. is trying now to fill the absence in the Middle East and Africa that was occupied by Russia, and to reinvigorate American multilateralism and diplomacy after four years of previous passive administration. On the other hand Trump had a noninterventionist policy. The republicans stepped back from involving in Libya's civil war aligning with the administration's policy "America First" that advocates for disengagement from overseas conflict and to only intervene when it is in America's interests.

To sum up, the current democrat administration is working on multiple fronts to reverse U.S. foreign policy during the Trump era. The current administration is concerned with international threats but not as much as the republicans. The administration is seeking to minimize the military role of the U.S. in the world and aims to depend on non-military tools in foreign policy,



particularly diplomacy. Biden has a different perspective which sharply differs than Trump on how U.S should engage in the world. Biden is driven by a more traditional collaborative strategy while Trump has a nationalistic approach. The current democrat's administration vision is for the U.S. to return as a global and proactive super power that also counters the entrenched influence of the Russians and the Chinese.