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**FPCI Virtual Public Lecture on Key Foreign Policy Issues  
That Await the Biden Administration  
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**Panelist:**

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**Host:**

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**OPENING REMARKS**

**Dino Patti Djalal**

- Quite a few are eager to hear of what Bob has to say about the Biden Policy. This makes it more interesting given what happened yesterday with the terrible attack on the Capitol Hill that fortunately did not disrupt the certification of the election results that affirm Biden and Kamala Harris as the next President and Vice President of the United States. But, this raises a lot of questions about how this impacts the US Foreign Policy under Biden. And certainly, for us in this part of the world, there are lots of questions being asked on what kind of Foreign Policy president will Biden be. How much time will he have on Foreign Policy, given the enormous domestic pressures in the United States, on COVID-19 and the economy. What will his first foreign policy move be? How different will it be from the Foreign Policy of President Trump? Definitely, it will totally be different, but how different? How will he handle China, and for us, in this part of the world, we would love to know what his foreign policy towards Asia would likely be.

**Robert Blake**

- I always appreciated the opportunity to speak with the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia. And it is becoming such an important forum for informing Indonesia's public about global foreign policy issues, but also the importance of, I think, Indonesia exercising a greater role in the world that reflects Indonesia's growing importance in the world. So, I always appreciate the chance to speak with your members. As you said, Dino, it seems almost trite to be talking about US foreign policy after the disgraceful storming of the US Capitol yesterday. But, I think the important fact is that the American institution held, and all hurdles have now been cleared for Joe Biden to be our next President on January 20th. I am happy to discuss that more in the Q&A if there is interest in that.

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- Let me just start with two quick disclaimers. I will be sharing a lot of personal judgements today, but I am speaking purely on a personal basis. These judgements do not reflect the views of either the McLarty Associates where I work, nor am I working with or serving as a proxy for the Biden Administration. So, with that out of the way, I thought I will use my time today to give you the sense of the world facing Joe Biden. And I am not going to pretend to give you a rundown of policy in every corner of the world. We don't have time for that, nor am I qualified for that. But after 35 years in government and now in private business, I do have a sense of the key issues that he is going to be focusing on.
  - First, I am going to talk about how the world has changed since he (Biden) left office. Second, I will discuss some of the daunting challenges that President-elect Biden will face when he takes office, but then also some of the reasons that I feel optimistic that he and the team will be up to the tasks. And then, most importantly, I will talk about the big foreign policy issues that are likely to dominate the agenda for his first few months or years, particularly China and Iran, but also these global issues like climate and democracy. And then of course I look forward to taking your questions for what I hope to be a great discussion. So let's jump right in.
  - Many Americans underestimate how much the world has changed in the last four years since Biden and many of his team was last in office. And certainly, this is not the world that Joe Biden left in 2016, and he and his team were certainly aware of that. On the economic front, America remains a leading economic power in the world, but the gap between us (the US) and the world is narrowing. It's shifting. And in particular, of course, the power of Asia as a whole led by China and India is steadily increasing. So, the centre of gravity is shifting from the West to East. And from advanced, mostly Western economies, to emerging markets.
  - A second major trend is that authoritarianism has been gaining ground in recent years, reversing the Cold War progress of democratization around the world. *Freedom House*, which tracks global democratic trends, noted in the most recent reports that 2019 marks the 14th consecutive years of decline in global freedom. And the wise Oxford historian, Timothy Garden Nash, recently observed it for the first time this century, among countries with more than a million people, there are now fewer democracies than there are non-democratic regimes. Pretty grim statistics.
  - A third major trend is a widening of income inequality in many countries, including the United States and Indonesia. And this is a complex topic that, of course, deserves its own talk, but in country after country, the top income segments of the population have made huge income gains over the last decade, while the bottom tiers have barely kept their heads above water. And among the reasons that this matter is that in the US and many other countries, inequality has reduced public support of free trade and globalization, and induced many governments to pursue more inward-looking policies that often favor onshoring and encouraging both local and foreign companies to localize production. And of course, COVID-19 has worsened this trend. The UN Development Programme in December reported that the virus has pushed an
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additional 200 million people into poverty around the world. The overall total is now 1 billion, which is 1/6th of humanity. Again, a really staggering number.

- Let me turn quickly to the questions of whether Biden can overcome some of the challenges, as Dino alluded. The President-elect of course has faced skepticism in many parts of the world of whether he will be able to successfully deal with and overcome challenges in America that can inhibit the ability to lead globally. And let me mention a few of those. Global public opinion polls, for example, ranks the US at or near the bottom of rankings of countries for how they have managed COVID-19 challenge, raising questions about whether the US is as competent and ready to lead as everyone used to believe.
- There is further concern that America's shaky handling of the coronavirus could delay our economic recovery, that of the world's largest market, and also limit our capacity to resume ambitious foreign aids and climate assistance programs.
- Still another concern is whether President-elect Biden can overcome the crippling partisanship that has gripped our country over the last years and brought Congress to a near standstill. And many fear that President Trump will continue to have significant influence on the Republican party, thereby diminishing the space for many Republican to support more ambitious foreign policy priorities. Many wonder whether President Trump's steady America First isolationism has diminished public support in the US for us to resume more of a leadership role in the world.
- Many wonder whether Biden can be yet another one-term President, defeated by Trump or another Republican in 2024, bringing yet another reversal in American policies.
- These are all legitimate questions, but I think there are some reasons for optimism. Let me just mention a few. First, I am very, very encouraged by what we have seen so far in terms of the caliber of cabinet secretaries and White House senior staff that Biden is bringing in. Almost without exception, these are exceptionally competent leaders, who for the most part bring decades of experience working in and out of the government.
- For example, the President's nominee to be Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, was the staff director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during Biden's ten years as the chairmanship. In the Obama administration, he chaired what is known as the Deputies Committee, in his role as the Deputy National Security Advisor. And this is, for those of you who don't know it, is the committee of key deputy level cabinet leaders who gathered, sometimes multiple times a week in the White House situation room, to hash out all the most difficult foreign policy issues that we are not able to resolve at lower levels. Blinken served in that gruelling role from 2013 to 2015, before becoming Deputy Secretary of State from 2015 to 2017. He has intimate first hand knowledge in every single key foreign policy issue you can ever imagine. I had the privilege of hosting him for a two-day visit to Indonesia, while I was ambassador there, so he knows your country very well and has very fond memories of your visit.
- Likewise, Jake Sullivan, President Biden's choice for national security adviser, is widely regarded by career-folks like me as one of the brightest thinkers that we have

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ever served with. He served for much of the Obama administration as Hilary Clinton's Head of Policy Planning, but he was also a Rhode Scholar at Yale. He is always the smartest guy in the room, but he also was somebody who took the time to listen to and learn from the career front service. He enjoys just incredible respect from all of us who worked with him.

- As to the question of whether Americans support America resuming its more traditional leadership role in the world, I believe they will. Recent polls, such as the study by the *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, show that 7 of 10 Americans believe that the United States should take a more active role in world affairs, and 7 in 10 also believes that US military alliances with other countries contribute to US safety. This is despite the current President's steady drumbeat of rhetoric against such international engagement. So that is encouraging.
  - At certain times, I think Biden and his team are very conscious of the need for them to do a better job of explaining and making sure that foreign policy is providing concrete benefits to the American people.
  - Another former Deputy Secretary of State and career foreign policy officer, Bill Burns, who now leads the *Carnegie Endowment*, led a study to try to find a way to reconnect US foreign policy to the broader agenda of domestic renewal. So they undertook a systematic two-year survey of three heartland states: Ohio, Colorado and Nebraska. Talk with a huge range of officials, labor leaders, farmers, small business owners, and came out with a terrific report on making the US foreign policy work for the middle class. Ambassador Burns in recent op-eds should have highlighted several of the conclusions and let me just briefly summarize them.
    - One, our foreign economic diplomacy has to aim less simply at opening markets abroad, and much more directly at inclusive economic growth at home, so that the benefits of our work do not just benefit big American corporations, but also small and medium sized enterprises, who are really the lifeblood of our economy and Indonesia's economy. And part of that has to be reinvesting in our own competitiveness, by enhancing the productivity of our workforce, investing in education, in research and development in areas like biotechnology and AI and nanotechnology. And Biden I think is pledged to do exactly this.
    - I think the second study conclusion that will be of interest to FPCI members is that the people interviewed had no appetite in a new Cold War with China, or for a massive new effort against an authoritarian state. Rather, they prefer a more humble foreign policy, a more restrained one about using military force, and more focus about using diplomacy. They believe that while we must certainly continue to promote Human Rights overseas, we have to first rebuild the power of our own example, and also be honest about the limits of our ability to transform other societies. I think, again, President-elect Biden will agree with all of that advice.
  - Let us take the question of whether our country really is in long-term decline, and count me among those who have faith in America's ability to reinvent itself. We have
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seen periods in the past during the 1980s when many pundits express concerns that Japan will take over the United States. Of course after 9/11, we went through a protracted period, but in each case, subsequent periods brought unprecedented periods of prosperity and innovation. Why is that? Harvard Professor Joe Nye and many others have long pointed to the many advantages that the United States enjoys.

- One, of course, is the young population, and until recently, at least, an open immigration system that I think will return, that refreshes our workforce and diversity. We are blessed with abundant energy resources that enabled us to become a net hydrocarbon exporter. We are at peace with our two immediate neighbors and we have two large oceans to separate us from others. We have an unrivalled network of strong alliances, very strong capacities for innovation that is driven by our university system and of course, our venture capital system. So, America has a lot going for it, and I think we are in a good position to, again, reinvent ourselves and revitalize ourselves.
- As to the question of the gridlock in congress, I think that the situation will be better because the Democrats will have control of the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives, thanks to the two recent elections in Georgia. Although both the margins in the Senate and the House, will be very, very narrow. We are going to need a lot of diplomacy on the Hill. Biden brings 36 years of experience as a senator to the White House. For many of those years, he worked with Republican colleagues like the current majority leader Mitch McConnell, to get important legislation past.
- During the Obama administration, he was kind of the Republican whisperer on the Hill to round up key Republican votes to secure passages of major legislations like the Affordable Care Act. Therefore, I think that he is going to be able to do that again, and I do think that there is scope for quite a number of bills to pass with bipartisan support, and I am glad to talk more about that in the Q&A if there is interest.
- A final point is that Americans overwhelmingly want their members of Congress to work together to get things done and stop arguing. Now that we have an experienced president ready to work on a bi-partisan basis, there should be room to really honor that mandate.
- Let us turn to the issues and some of the countries that are likely to top the foreign policy to-do list in the Biden Administration. We have to start from COVID-19. Biden has been clear from the beginning that job number one for his administration will be to get on top of the coronavirus ripping our country. I do not need to review for you the statistics on that. You all know very well.
- But even as the President and his team encourage more consistent mask-wearing and grapple with the logistics of vaccinating as many as our fellow countrymen as quickly and fairly and efficiently as possible, COVID-19 also represents an opportunity for some early foreign policy successes. Samantha Power, our former Ambassador to the UN under Obama and a former colleague of mine when I was Assistant Secretary of State, offered some quite useful suggestions in the current issues of foreign affairs.

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- She recommended that Biden starts by having the United States join COVAX, the UN Coalition of Global Health Organizations and others, who are working together to provide equitable COVID-19 treatments and vaccines, and even the best case scenarios suggested that with COVAX and other efforts that are underway only about a quarter of the global population is expected to receive the vaccines by the end of 2021. And that is kind of a sad statistic.
  - Therefore, the United States is going to be in a quite unique position to accelerate that timetable. And we have unparalleled scientific expertise of the Centre for Disease Control and others. And of course the global reach of expertise of institutions like the US Agency for International Development. I think we are well-positioned to help in that regard. I think all of these countries and institutions would welcome a leading role by the US, given our leadership in the past in responding to global health challenges like the Ebola Crisis and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
  - I think the COVID Crisis also presents a big diplomatic opportunity to work with other countries to think of how to prevent the next pandemic. Those of you who are in Indonesia would recognize this. This is a Pangolin. COVID-19, like many of the worst diseases in the world can be traced back to pathogens like a virus that makes a jump from animals to humans. That is what happens with Ebola, AIDS, SARS and many others. With COVID-19, there are still a lot of debates about what happened, but there is some evidence that a pangolin from Malaysia such as the one you see here may have been the carrier, which was then illegally trafficked through Vietnam, and finally to Wuhan.
  - Hence, there is a two-fold need here. First, we have got to develop a greater scientific understanding of how these diseases jump from animals to humans. Then we have to do a better job of stopping the traders who traffic in wildlife. When I was an Ambassador in Indonesia, wildlife experts there told me that a billion dollars worth of illegal wildlife trade was exported out of Indonesia in one year, and that is just one country. So, a truly staggering indicator of the scale of all of this that is going on. The bottomline is that there is much to do on COVID and I think US diplomacy can play a role.
  - A second early opportunity is to immediately enhance global or international efforts to address climate change. During the presidential campaign, Biden characterizes climate change as an existential threat and the number one issue facing humanity. And in all of the debates and speeches during the campaign, he stresses the opportunity to build a more resilient, sustainable economy that will put the US on a path to achieve net zero carbon emissions, no later than 2050. And he pledged to invest 1.7 trillion dollars in renewable and climate research over the next decade. And of course, he appointed former Secretary of State, John Kerry, as his Climate Special Envoy.
  - So, what can be done? First, in the spirit of how foreign policy can help ordinary Americans, as we ramp up our own clean energy infrastructure and technology, we have an important chance to help our clean energy company sell their technology and expertise overseas. And that of course can create millions of US jobs, and our embassies around the world are ready to help in that regard.
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- Second Biden secretary Kerry has telegraphed their intention to not only significantly increase America's own emission reductions, but also to undertake energetic diplomacy to pressure other countries to make more ambitious reductions at the next UN climate talks at Glasgow, Scotland in 2021. And I think there is considerable scope for that now, because other major emitters, China, the EU, Japan, and others, have all announced variance of plans to reach net carbon neutrality at or around 2050.
  - As this net chart shows, the cost of renewables such as solar and wind have now fallen below coal and gas. Thus, there is a tremendous economic ace to make, and again, despite a lot of recent progress, the share of renewables and global electricity generation remains a relatively modest 25%. So there is room to do much more, and in countries like Indonesia itself, there are big opportunities to scale up renewables. So this opens the door for us to work with these countries, including China, to make joint representations to other major emitters to join in making more emissions reduction. That was the successful formula that led to the landmark Paris Agreement in 2015. And the US and China then were the two largest emitters. We agreed on ambitious cuts. And then, that created the impetus for the US and the UN and others to press the rest of the world to match those cuts.
  - Third, I think diplomacy has to bring international business into the picture. Unlike in Paris, there has really been a sea change in the way that most big multinational corporations now understand that it is in their interest to integrate climate into their planning. Let me give you just two quick examples. One is Walmart, the world's largest retailer, which has undertaken enormous efforts to reduce not just its greenhouse gas emissions, but those of its supply chain, which of course is vast.
  - The country's Chief Sustainability Officer, Kathleen McLaughlin, announced last month that the company is on track to cut 1 billion metric tons of emissions, from its global supply chains by 2030. And to give you just a unit of comparison, one billion metric tons is 20% of what the US as a whole emitted in 2017, in energy-related carbon dioxide. And Walmart is not alone. There are now more than 1,000 global MNCs that have joined a global initiative that is spearheaded by the World Resources Institute, the World Wildlife Fund and others, to set what are called science-based emission reduction targets with their companies. So there is a lot of momentum. I am really encouraged and optimistic that there is going to be more significant progress made in Glasgow.
  - Let me turn to another difficult, functional issue that is likely to earn early attention from President-elect Biden, and that is to promote democracy and human rights. The Trump administration, as all of you know, largely downgraded this as a priority of US foreign policy, except in cases where it butchers other priorities such as the Chinese human rights violations against the Uighurs. And human rights defenders around the world despaired when the Trump administration announced its decision to withdraw from the Human Rights Council, as part of its wider antipathy towards the UN.
  - And certainly, the UNHRC has its faults, but the Obama administration, in my view, wisely decided to rejoin the UNHRC in 2009, so we could influence it from within.
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And I think we are able to do that. So the UNHRC does matter and having the US in it, I think, does make a difference to the strength of the institution.

- So, what should we expect from Biden on democracy and human rights? Since re-establishing our moral leadership that has got to start at home, the President-elect has already talked about some of his steps that he is going to take, and those include immediately ending the horrific practice of separating families at our border. Second, he wants to terminate the Trump administration travel ban against people from Muslim-majority countries. These would be very important first steps to show the administration is seriousness and purposeful.
- But to reaffirm America's international leadership, President Biden has also pledged to organize, during his first year in office, a summit of the world's democracies. And his advisors have said that the summit will seek concrete country commitments in different areas: corruption, defending against authoritarianism, including election security, and asking countries to advance human rights, not only in their own nations, but around the world.
- And importantly, this summit would include civil society organizations from around the world and of course have a call to action for tech and social media companies to make their own commitments to help preserve open democratic society.
- The third functional area I want to cover is trade. Even though Biden has said he wants first to enhance America's competitiveness before he considers new deals, trade is an important part of our economy, so I cannot just really leave it out. US Chamber Commerce estimates that slightly less than 40 million American jobs depend on trade. So our success in opening markets is critical to the success of the US economy and rebuilding our economy. And Biden has clearly stated that before thinking about new trade deals, he wants to negotiate from a position of strength. So he wants first to restore America's competitiveness, by scaling up research and development programs, by investing in America's workers, and by improving America's infrastructures.
- In his first economic address after the election, he said that the United States needs to be aligned with other democracies so that we can set the rules of the road, instead of having China and others dictate those outcomes. Therefore, he is likely to take a worker-focused, more multilateral approach that attempts to address national security, but also domestic job security.
- For example, he has said he is not going to immediately move to reduce the 25% tariff that Trump imposed on roughly half of China's exports to the United States. But he will conduct a full review of the phase one agreement, and more importantly, he will consult with Asian and European allies to develop a more coherent strategy so that we can enhance our collective leverage. And I think that is very, very important to know. Because a lot of what Trump tries to do, he tried to do by himself, and he just really did not get very far from any of it.
- The tough question for Biden will be to rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership or its successor the CP-TPP. There is increased skepticism in Congress about trade

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agreements, and any changes that are proposed by the Biden administration would have to be approved not only by congress but also by the other 11 countries, so that is a fairly heavy lift. And that is one of the reasons why trade is in one of the medium-term arising.

- Let me turn to some of the key countries that are likely to be the focus of early diplomacy, starting with China and Iran. America's most important rival for global influence now is China. An attitude towards China has undergone a big change in recent years. For many years, the US sought to engage China, because the prevailing wisdom was that as China was admitted in the global institutions like the World Trade Organization, and as China develops, the odds were that China would slowly develop a more market-oriented economy, it would provide more democratic opportunities for its people, and would become, in the words of former World Bank President Bob Zoellick, a "responsible stakeholder." Well, that strategic bet proved wrong. Both Republicans and Democrats now agree that instead of becoming a responsible stakeholder, China has doubled-down on using illegal subsidies, protectionism, cheating on trade rules, forced technology transfers, stealing intellectual property – all policies that leaders on both sides of the congressional aisle agree need to be confronted. China, under President Xi Jinping, has also undertaken a made-in-China 2025 plan, that has offered massive subsidies to make China's private and state-owned companies world-leaders in areas like supercomputing, AI, 3D-printing, facial recognition software, robotics, electric cars – I could go on.
- Thus, it is a formidable competitor on these fronts. Yet, China is not the fearsome superpower that is seeking to take over the world that many Americans seem to believe. China faces a series of internal challenges, one of them is demographic decline because of its previous one child per family policy. A second is that President Xi's reassertion of state controls over the economy is expected to undermine future growth, as is capital flight by wealthy Chinese who are moving hundreds billions of dollars offshore and environmental degradation that is stunting agricultural production and the health of the Chinese people. Those same bureaucrats who are leading the made-in-China 2025 effort are also the ones who are directing bank loans and subsidies to often inefficient state-owned enterprises and infrastructure projects with no real plausible rates of return, giving China a potentially destabilising stock of debt. In addition, I think China's top university, Peking University, falls behind 50 American universities, while professors and students at Chinese colleges aren't really allowed to write or speak freely. Moreover, only one in three Chinese adults aged 20-64 have attended high school, well below the 90% average in high-income countries like the US or Germany, according to research from Stanford University.
- While overseas Chinese programs, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, has certainly created good-will in many countries, it is also true that China's aggressive policies in the South China Sea, its recent aggression in the Himalayas, its wolf-warrior diplomats who unabashedly hit back at any criticism of China or the Communist Party, leave many partners uneasy and seeking a warmer economic and sometimes military embrace, from the U.S., Japan, Korea and others, so that these countries do

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not become dependent on and at the mercy of China. I think global opinion polls bare that out.

- While global confidence in President Trump is not high, President Xi also inspires very little confidence. In contrast to presidential campaigns in the past, the topic of China was raised only sporadically in the Trump-Biden campaign, mostly because both sides shared a relatively similar view of the threats that China poses. And for all of Trump's and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's bluster, their China policy, for the most part, led to larger US trade deficits, little to no increase to manufacturing jobs in the US, and diminished US influence in Asia.
- How will China policy look like under President-elect Biden? Unlike President Trump, who pursued an increasingly confrontational approach with China, Biden is more likely to favour a steadier and more coherent China policy that puts a premium on coordinating with the EU, Japan and South Korea, and other friends to maximise our chances for success, while leaving open the possibility of working with China on global issues like climate change. Although Biden when he was Vice President got to know President Xi quite well, his own attitude has hardened. He termed Xi a 'thug' in the election campaign, and I think it likely that the Biden team will restore a high level of strategic dialogue between our two governments, similar to what the Obama administration conducted, but was abandoned by Trump.
- And as to some of the specific policies that we might anticipate, I expect Biden's economic team will continue to push back strongly on Chinese illegal subsidies, protectionism and some of these other things I talked about earlier that hurt American companies doing business in China. He is likely to continue freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, and oppose China's militarization of the disputed islands of that area. And of course he is going to continue our engagement with the Quad countries like Australia, India and Japan. I think he is going to probably continue US advocacy on behalf of the Uyghurs, and those in Hong Kong who are seeking to preserve Hong Kong's special status, And as I mentioned earlier, I think we will see the new administration seek to coordinate with China on climate, but China should also expect pressure for them to cease both their exports of coal-fired power plants, and their efforts to construct new ones domestically. Republican and Democrat hawks are also likely to press what is known as economic-decoupling, that many feel is a way that we can reduce any dependency on Chinese technology and weaken China's economy. My own sense is that we are likely to continue the decoupling process on semiconductors, but on other products I think Biden is more likely to try to increase the competitiveness of U.S. products by boosting research and development spending, for which I think there would be Republican support. Why do I say that? I think it is because the Chinese market is just too important for our companies to pursue more comprehensive decoupling. Therefore, I think enhancing our ability to compete is really the right way to go.
- Let me turn to the Middle East and Iran, which is always a flashpoint in American foreign policy. Perhaps one of the most important and difficult decisions that President-elect Biden will face will not be China, but it will be Iran. Jake Sullivan,

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incoming National Security Advisor, said in a recent interview that if Iran comes back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal by, for example, dismantling the required number of centrifuges, then the US will also return to the Iran agreement. You will recall that this was the deal that was negotiated between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, as well as Germany and the EU in 2015. And under that accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions. Of course, Trump withdrew from that deal as one of his very first acts as President. However, as with the case of many Trump's policy, his go-it-alone policy in Iran produced very few positive results, and in fact has allowed Iran to move much closer to the point where they will be able to develop a nuclear weapon faster now than if they had continued to abide by the previous restrictions.

- I should also mention that circumstances have changed on both sides. One is that Iran continues to develop missile and drone capabilities that arguably pose as much or more of an immediate threat than any putative nuclear weapon. This was demonstrated last September when Iran launched drones and cruise missile strikes against several important Saudi Arabian oil fields and processing centers, causing widespread damage. As *New York Times* columnist Tom Freidman observed, the Iranian drones and cruise missiles flew in with such stealth that neither their take-off nor their impending attack was detected in time, either by Saudi or US radar, stunning analysts in the region. Since the Gulf Arabs and Israel are clearly much more affected by Iran's military and other destabilizing activities, the US and other signatories of the original deal will face the difficult question of whether these countries also should be brought into the negotiation, which of course would make an already complex negotiation even more difficult. It is this more dangerous Iran that has been a driver of recently successful efforts by the Trump Administration to forge new peace deals between Israel, UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan. There are also signs that Saudi Arabia may also be considering a peace agreement, possibly before Trump leaves office, but that seems increasingly unlikely.
- The wider dynamic here is that Iran has been expanding its support to proxies, in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq. Thus, Israel is understandably concerned that Iran is encircling it through these proxies, and then arming them with missile capabilities,
- And, of course, Iran has its own considerations that may limit its willingness to re-enter talks. Iran was enraged when suspected Israeli agents recently were reported to have assassinated the father of Iran's nuclear weapons program. That attack put pressure on Iran's president, Rouhani, to retaliate, but he knows that that would risk a wider escalation by Israel and potentially retaliation by the United States itself. The attack also hardened the attitude of hardliners inside Iran, who opposed the nuclear deal to begin with, and have always argued that negotiating with the West is a fool's errand. Thus, this combustible mix poses very difficult questions for Biden and his team. I think the good news is that the Trump sanctions have reduced Iran's oil exports by more than half since 2016, so Tehran is anxious to get these sanctions lifted. Jake Sullivan also said that if Iran re-enters compliance with the Iran deal, and

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the US re-enters, that could then provide the basis for follow-on negotiations, both on ballistic missile-capabilities, but also potentially to follow-on conversations between the original negotiators and what he called regional players – he didn't spell that out.

- The other thing to note, I think, is that the Biden team can hit the ground running on this issue. Many of the key negotiators, including Jake Sullivan himself, and the incoming Deputy Secretary of State, Wendy Sherman, will be coming back into government. They bring enormous experience and knowledge to this and again, can hit the ground running.
- How can the Biden administration rebuild the State Department to be the spearhead for all of these initiatives that I have discussed here? One of the best secretaries of state that I ever worked for, Colin Powell, used to say that we are strongest when the face of America is not a soldier carrying a gun, but a diplomat negotiating peace: a peace-corps volunteer bringing clean water to a village or a relief worker stepping off a cargo plane as flood waters rise somewhere. From the beginning of his administration, President Trump sought to weaken the State Department by proposing 30% cuts to the department's budget, appointing an unprecedented percentage of political appointees as ambassadors and to key sub-cabinet positions, or simply leaving many key positions unfilled. Therefore, no wonder that morale in the State Department is at an all time low.
- This grim picture motivated two of our most heralded under-Secretaries of State, Ambassador Nick Burns and Ambassador Marc Grossman to undertake a detailed study of how to rebuild a strong and high-performing foreign service to defend our country and advance our interests in the 21st century. Thus, under the auspices of the non-partisan American diplomacy project, at *Harvard Kennedy School*, they met over the past year with more than 200 people, surveying retired state department officers, business leaders, senior military officers including two former chairmen of the joint chiefs, two former CI. directors, etc. The resulting blueprint makes 10 principle recommendations. The goal is to create a stronger and non-partisan foreign service by expanding the number of ambassadorial and senior Washington assignments for career professionals. Specifically they recommend that they constitute 90% of the assignment, up from traditionally 70%. They also want to initiate a complete overhaul of our personnel system to make it more modern, flexible, transparent and so forth. All of these will be very sensible long-overdue reforms that I think Biden, the Secretary of State and career officers of the State Department are likely to embrace.
- Let me sum up by saying that as President Biden enters office at this exceptionally difficult time, I believe that with the superb foreign policy team he is assembling, the reservoir of goodwill he is likely to generate from a world that is going to be grateful for America's re-engagement, and by reinvigorating the State Department, America will once again have the opportunity to lead and make a difference in the world.

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## DISCUSSION

### Dr. Dino Patti Djalal

- I will ask a few questions. One is the emphasis on democracy that the Biden administration will have, especially with the possible launch of the Democracy Summit in 2021. How will Biden advance the democracy agenda without looking selective and inconsistent? What I mean is that they (the US) would pressure certain countries on democracy issues, but on other countries, such as those in the Middle East, they would either turn the other cheek or be very soft. This has been noticed by countries outside the United States, so how do they escape this impression?

### Robert Blake

- I think that is a very fair point, and certainly under the Trump Administration, as I mentioned, human rights were subordinated to a more strategic issue. They used them when they were useful, but they were not a priority in their own right, and I think that will change with this administration. I am encouraged that Biden has said that we have to rebuild the power of our own example first. We have suffered some serious blows to our own credibility, so I am happy to hear that he is going to start with that priority. But I agree with you that we need to have a consistent foreign policy that treats everybody equally, but the reality is that around the world our strategic interests are different, and sometimes you need a country to do something or you want them to be a part of a big initiative, thus you are not going to poke them in the eye directly and publicly for what they are doing. But I can assure you that American diplomats under Biden will be working behind the scenes on democracy and human rights issues. They may differ slightly on what they say publicly about these issues. But I do think there will be more consistency of application under the Biden administration, and the fact that he is making this a priority and talking about this big summit I think itself is an important sign of the priority he is going to devote to this.

### Dr. Dino Patti Djalal

- What do you say to those who might say that the emphasis on democracy and human rights in some countries would make the United States less competitive vis-à-vis China. Obviously these issues are not at the forefront of China's foreign policy agenda, and the countries would say: 'fine if you pressure us on those issues, we have China offering this and that'.

### Robert Blake

- It is true, one of the issues we grappled when I was assistant secretary of state and afterwards, in South and Central Asia, was that the Chinese were already beginning these very large programs under the Belt and Road Initiative, and were giving these loans and other programs without any conditions whatsoever. Thus, many of these countries, like the Maldives that were going through a difficult and tumultuous transition, said to India and the United States: fine, if you're going to try and force us to abide by your human rights principles, we will just go to the Chinese. Moreover, it

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had the practical impact, at least on the part of the Indians, of diminishing their willingness to talk about human rights issues because they didn't want to lose strategic space to the Chinese. Therefore, it does have an impact, but I think that we have to stand up for our principles, and maybe we will be a little more careful about how we do these things publicly versus privately, but I do think the world would benefit from a return to more vigorous American advocacy of democracy and human rights because of the really distressing trends that we have seen over the last 20 years.

### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- I just finished reading the book by Bob Gates, *The Exercise of Power*. It is a really good book and I would advise people to read it. But there was one point that Bob Gates made, that there was a time when Obama held a meeting with his advisors, and they looked at how much Russia allocated money for public diplomacy, and how much China allocated money for public diplomacy – a huge amount. Obama asked ‘can we match that?’ The answer was ‘no way’. In other words, the US spends a very miniscule amount on public diplomacy relative to Russia and China. Is that something that is going to be fixed? Diplomats can only do so much, but with the budget for it, you can't do much.

### **Robert Blake**

- I hope so. I think public diplomacy has really suffered some significant cuts in its budget. We define public diplomacy, not just in terms of how you, for example, promote your policies overseas, but also the very important education and cultural exchanges that I think have a much greater long-term impact on changing people's attitudes. I used to say my favourite program when I was in Indonesia, was the Youth Exchange Program. It brought 80 Indonesian high school students who were in their junior year to live with a host family in tiny little towns all over the United States. I would meet them before they left and then after they would come back, and the transformation in these kids was just incredible. Before, they would not really make eye contact and they would not really speak English, and they would come back just buzzing with excitement about their time in the United States. They could not wait to go back to study again, at university, and they were going to become like mini-ambassadors in their little communities. I think, in those kinds of programs, people do not understand how impactful they are. Therefore, I think that public diplomacy has to be understood from this wider perspective, and I hope that we do give it more of a priority, as the people we are competing with are currently putting resources into their own programs.

### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- Do you think President Trump, once he retires after January 20th, will continue to heckle President Biden on foreign policy issues. President George Bush was pretty quiet after he retired, and even Bill Clinton, too. Do you see Trump becoming a still continuing loud noise?

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**Robert Blake**

- I think Trump will try, but it is going to be a bit harder than it was before. I think the other factor that he is going to have to face is some quite serious legal challenges, particularly in the state of New York, that he is going to have to deal with. We will have to see what the outcome of those are, but these are serious people like Cyrus Vance, that would not bring these cases unless they felt they could win them. Thus, there is at least an outside chance that he could find himself guilty of some of the charges against him. I think that is going to consume a certain amount of his time. But I have no doubt that he is going to continue to do what he can, and there are reports, of course, that he entertains hopes, perhaps of running again in 2024. A lot of what he has been doing over the last three or four months has been with a view of, they say, keeping the sense of grievance and so forth going so that he can then run on that in 2024. I think that he will continue to try to exercise a role, but one of the really interesting things that has happened in just the last 24 hours is how many Republicans have broken with Trump openly. A lot of his senior staff have left the White House, a lot of cabinet officials, Elaine Chao who is married to Mitch McConnell, resigned today. Many of the senators who were standing with Trump have now parted company with him. They are beginning to put some distance between themselves and Trump, and realise that he has hurt himself a lot in the last two days.

**Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- I agree with you that Biden is going to need to step up on economic diplomacy, especially with Asia, but the reality is that the United States is shut out of some of the important architectures in Asia – out of TPP, by its own choice, and also out of the largest trading bloc in the world, RCEP. What would be the strategy to overcome that? You can only do so many bilateral free trade deals, and joining the larger architecture would be less time-consuming and require less energy, so how would they make up for that?

**Robert Blake**

- I think they are going to take this a little bit slowly, they are not going to jump right into this, we have got to do what we can to increase our own competitiveness. But, I think one of the interesting things I have learned in business, is that the people who are hurt by this are not the big multinational corporations, because they have operations around the world. They can still operate out of Vietnam or they can operate out of Indonesia. It is really the small and medium sized enterprises in the United States that really rely on these big agreements, like TPP. Therefore, I think there is a strategic case to be made to join current architecture, but the politics of this are difficult on the hill, and you are not going to see a unified Democrat front or even a unified Republican front. Biden will, therefore, have to manage this really carefully. I do believe there is a case to be made to rejoin but it is going to require some serious work, and Biden will have to think about what his other priorities are, versus

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healthcare, versus infrastructure, versus tax cuts, versus some of the big economic recovery programs for COVID. Those are also very important priorities, and does he want to use his leverage on trade? Probably not, but we will see.

### Q&A with Public

#### Dr. Dino Patti Djalal

- Arfi from Sri Lanka asks: what can be done by the upcoming US administration to improve relations with ASEAN countries, especially economic relations?

#### Robert Blake

- We are going to try to do what we can to first get our own act together, and work together to encourage our own competitiveness. In the long run, however, I do believe we have to become part of these larger trade agreements. You are going to see very vigorous diplomacy by the US Trade Representative and the Department of Commerce. We just announced today that the new Secretary of Commerce is the very highly regarded Governor of Rhode Island, Gina Raimondo. She has a very good economic background and is very well respected. Therefore, I think you are going to see a more concerted approach, you are going to see continued efforts to take advantage of programs like the Development Finance Corporation, and the US Export-Import Bank. Hopefully, we will use those in more strategic ways so that we can compete with the Chinese and others. And you are going to see very active diplomacy to promote our business overseas and make sure that we can compete with the Chinese, but also with our friends like the Japanese, the Europeans and others. Even if the trade agreement agenda does not start right away, you are going to see very active diplomacy from the get-go.

#### Dr. Dino Patti Djalal

- We have a question from Luluk, from Wahid Hasyim University: how would President Joe Biden, in foreign policy, see cybersecurity, and with regard to collaboration with other private and government entities.

#### Robert Blake

- You may have read that we have just learned of one of the most serious cyber attacks in our history that our intelligence services believe was conducted by the Russians. Now, there is a very active forensic investigation that is underway, to determine exactly what the purpose of it was and what the impact of it was. It appears that it was not an attack to bring down any systems or anything like that, but more just an intelligence gathering operation. But again, it is very early in the investigation to figure that out. It does underline, however, that while everybody was focused, during the election, on the possibility that Russia or China or Iran or somebody else could try to use cyber means to disrupt the election – that never happened. But they appear to have taken their eye off the ball of what was going on elsewhere in the penetration of

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our systems. It underlines the need to take this very seriously. Trump unfortunately disbanded the White House cybersecurity czar position. President Biden has indicated that he is going to reinstate that, which is good because you have to have somebody in the White House who is charged everyday with overseeing cybersecurity efforts in the inner agency. Every single agency has got to be involved, because if there is a vulnerability anywhere it is going to infect the entire community. Therefore, I am encouraged that this is going to again become a very high priority for the next administration. It has to, it is one of the most important things that we can do, not only protect our government, but our companies and our trade secrets and so many other things.

### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- The next question is from Steffani: Biden has not specifically said about the United States joining COVAX, in your opinion, how will Biden balance between domestic pressure to handle the pandemic to properly vaccinate Americans, while ensuring the US leadership in global efforts for an equitable vaccine distribution.

### **Robert Blake**

- It is true that he has not said that, but I think that his temperament is such that he believes in multilateral approaches to these kinds of global challenges. Thus, I think it would be natural for the United States under a Biden administration to join COVAX. Many of our companies are leading the world in terms of developing these vaccines, therefore there is going to be a very active competition to not only get access to those vaccines but also to understand how we can really build up production of the vaccines, once they have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and other regulatory authorities. And again, we have significant opportunities and significant capabilities in that area. I very much hope that one of the priorities of the new administration will be to look at that, and to not only make sure that all Americans have access to these life-saving vaccines, but that we also work with COVAX and other companies around the world -- and with large producers like Germany, which, of course, have their own substantial capabilities, to figure how to ramp up production of these vaccines so that access can be accelerated and enhanced. The economy is not going to recover and we are not going to get beyond this terrible virus until we can make sure that everyone has access to a vaccine. I think one of the saddest things is that we do face a problem of inequality, where particularly many African countries and other low-income countries are going to receive the vaccine much later than countries like the United States. That is something that I think all of us have to be concerned about and make sure that we try to address as quickly as possible.

### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- We just ended our year-end press statement at the FPCI, and we believe that the COVID-19 situation will get worse in the coming months, and it has gotten worse,

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including in Indonesia. And we think that vaccine diplomacy, vaccine nationalism, and vaccine politics will be the dominant issues in 2021, and if the United States' first foreign policy moves are all about other things, other than the COVID-19 vaccine issue globally, the perception will be that 'hey you're messing with the boat, everybody else is doing this thing, and you are doing other things.'

### **Robert Blake**

- The other, I think, somewhat alarming development is that new strains of COVID are now coming out. We've seen one in South Africa and one in the UK, and these are now much more highly infectious strains of the virus -- in the case of the South Africa one, less susceptible to treatment by the existing vaccines. I think that all of the *bon ami* about how the world is going to recover by June of 2021 – we need to be careful about that. There are still quite a number of challenges ahead, not just on the vaccines distribution front, but on the mutations of these viruses. For example, the UK has just announced its own second or maybe third lockdown, and more than half of the people who were infected during the lockdown were from this new virus; so it spread just like wildfire through the United Kingdom and I think it has now been detected in 33 countries. Though, it is a very serious problem and an issue that everybody is going to have to follow very closely, and again another one that calls for very good global coordination and information sharing.

### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- I have a question from Ivan Korompis: how will President Biden repair the damage that has been done to US democracy – obviously I think he is referring to what happened yesterday – especially in terms of the US democratic standing in the world.

### **Robert Blake**

- You heard me talk in my remarks about some of the things he is going to do right away, such as stopping the practice of separating parents from their children at the US ports of entry, particularly with Central America and Mexico but, you know, I think there is a lot to be done. Since the elephant in the room is this Capitol Hill violence, let me just make a couple of observations about that. I think the most important thing for all of you to understand is that as disgraceful and as sad as that spectacle looks, our system of constitutional law bended – but did not break. In the end, the US Congress certified Biden's victory last night at 3:30 in the morning and thereby finalised the election process – Biden will be our next President, on January 20th. Sadly, I think right-wing media that support Trump, like the *One America News Network* and *Newsmax*, continue to pedal falsehoods about blaming left-wing activists, blaming the media, and even blaming poor Vice President Pence – who has been so loyal – for the violence that took place yesterday, instead of blaming the pro-Trump rioters. And I think because of Trump's steady-stream of falsehoods and because of these media, our country is going to remain divided. I read an awful statistic the other day that a staggering 52% of white males in America believe that

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Trump won the election. Therefore, Biden has a big job ahead to try to heal these divisions, and to help these people understand that they have not been forgotten, and that he cares about their welfare, that he is going to do his best to make sure that they are part of the American recovery, that they receive the training they need if they need to be retrained, and that they are brought back into the economic mainstream. Because I think that is at the root of a lot of the anger that a lot of these people are expressing against our institutions and our system of government. Thus, that is going to be a very important priority for the President.

- I think the President himself is such a decent man himself and he himself has been such a strong supporter for so long on human rights and other issues, that people will understand that our institutions are back in solid hands. I think we will begin to rebuild our credibility and rebuild our reputation because the person who is President really does matter, and the words that come out of his or her mouth really do matter. I think he is going to do his very best to demonstrate that on a daily basis. Therefore, I am really not that worried about reclaiming our credibility, I think that will come relatively quickly, and you will see it through his actions.

#### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- I am really hopeful, because as you and I, who work in the field of diplomacy, know there are not really not a lot of countries that can move things in a big way, and the United States is certainly one of them. Your diplomatic resources, your economic resources, your technological resources, and your ability to mobilise countries – that is something really unbelievable and something that we miss because the United States keeps pulling out of a lot of things.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

#### **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**

- Let me ask a closing question, you know the last four years have been quite confusing for me, and maybe for many others, because we saw a different kind of US nationalism. President Trump seems to have found a way to awaken some raw nerves in a certain base of American society, and frame it as the patriotic American nationalism, but I think for many of us outside America and for many inside the United States, I see it as an arrogant, intolerant, narrow-minded and macho nationalism – at least that's how we see it from the outside. I am just wondering, as somebody who lives in the United States and especially in Washington, and you know you feel the beat of what is happening in the United States, what kind of nationalism will emerge now in the next four years under the Biden administration?

#### **Robert Blake**

- I think you are going to see a lot less chest-thumping by the next administration and a lot more effort to work with our friends and allies around the world, including Indonesia, on the problems that the world faces. Again, I go back to that study that I

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talked about, that Bill Burns undertook with Carnegie where they went out and talked to people in the heartland of our country, in places like Nebraska. I was encouraged that those people still believe that the United States has an important role to play, but that we also have to be more humble. We have to understand that there is never going to be another effort like Iraq, where we think we can go in and topple a government, and install by some magic formula a democratic government that is suddenly going to be friendly to the United States. Those things just do not work. It is too hard and we overestimate our capabilities, we end up being dragged into long wars that claim many American lives and hurt our reputation around the world – and nobody knows that better than Joe Biden. He consistently argued against expanding troop levels in places like Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Therefore, I do think that we are entering the period where certainly we're all still proud to be Americans, but we are going to try and work as much as possible with our friends and allies to solve these common problems that we have, and you are not going to see anymore of the sort of America-go-it-alone, and much more of a cooperative and hopefully successful foreign policy under the next Biden administration. Again, the team he is assembling has tremendous experience and has lived and worked around the world. I really am optimistic that we are going to see quite a sea change in the next several months, and that is good news not only for the United States but good news for the rest of the world as well.