**Biden’s NSC to focus on global health, climate, cyber and human rights, as well as China and Russia**

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The incoming Biden administration plans to restructure and expand the operations of the White House National Security Council, establishing new senior positions on global health, democracy and human rights, and cyber and emerging technology, signaling a sweeping shift in priorities, according to a senior adviser to the Biden transition.

Russia, which the Trump administration had subsumed into the NSC directorate for European affairs, will again be given its own NSC senior director, the adviser said, speaking on the condition of anonymity before the plans and positions were announced Friday.

“We expect to be taking a stronger position on China than has been the case in past Democratic administrations,” with significant new staff positions to handle “a much [more assertive China abroad](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-taiwan-invasion-military-exercise/2020/10/12/291f5d86-0c58-11eb-b404-8d1e675ec701_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_4), and a much [more repressive China](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-muslims-detention-centers-xinjiang-crackdown/2020/09/23/44d2ce50-f32b-11ea-8025-5d3489768ac8_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_4)” at home, the adviser said.

Each new administration has reorganized the NSC and put it to different purposes since the body was established more than seven decades ago to coordinate and reconcile diplomatic and military perspectives. Most have hewed, with mixed success amid competing priorities and conflicting personalities, to a basic formula in which NSC aides refine options, tee up final decisions to be made by the president, and make sure they are carried out.

President-elect Joe Biden, facing [massive domestic problems](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/01/04/unemployment-never-recevied/?itid=lk_inline_manual_8) and a rapidly changing strategic landscape, has said his goal is to break down barriers between national security and domestic policy, “especially on crosscutting issues” such as “covid, climate, migration and even U.S.-China relations that have touched so many domestic equities,” the senior adviser said.

In a press release on the new NSC hires, Biden said he and his team would “ensure that the needs of working Americans are front and center in our national security policymaking.” With more appointments still to come, more than half of the newly appointed senior NSC officials are expected to be women.

Another transition official said that even on those issues that don’t have an obvious domestic nexus, such as nuclear threats from [North Korea](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/north-korea-kim-jong-un-coronavirus/2021/01/06/9a1cca5e-4fd4-11eb-a1f5-fdaf28cfca90_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_13) and [Iran](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-nuclear-uranium-enrichment/2021/01/04/588949be-4e76-11eb-a1f5-fdaf28cfca90_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_13), “part of the metric” for judging policy success will be “what this is doing for the American people, American workers, American families.”

Biden’s NSC also is designed to repair what he and other critics charge has been a largely dysfunctional national security team under President Trump, who hired four and fired three national security advisers.

The policymaking influence of Trump’s NSC, like much of his administration, rose and fell depending on the whims of the president. In its first iteration, it gave Trump’s then-chief strategist and campaign guru, Stephen K. Bannon, a seat at the NSC “principals” table, usually reserved for top national security officials and Cabinet secretaries, and downgraded the roles of military and intelligence chiefs.

Biden’s only addition to the traditional table is former secretary of state John F. Kerry, whom he has named as special envoy for climate and a fully fledged NSC principal.

Most of Biden’s top national security picks so far, including [Jake Sullivan as national security adviser and Antony Blinken, his nominee for secretary of state](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-picks-antony-blinken-as-secretary-of-state-emphasizing-experience-and-the-foreign-policy-establishment/2020/11/22/94f91ac6-2d3a-11eb-bae0-50bb17126614_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_21), are veterans of the Obama administration, as are many of the new hires. They include Elizabeth Cameron, a biologist and biodefense expert who wrote the Obama “pandemic playbook” as NSC director for global health security, the job to which she will now return as senior director for global health security and biodefense. [The health directorate itself was eliminated by Trump.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/nsc-pandemic-office-trump-closed/2020/03/13/a70de09c-6491-11ea-acca-80c22bbee96f_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_21)

Among nearly two dozen appointees named Friday, Jon Finer will become Sullivan’s principal deputy. He was an adviser and speechwriter for then-Vice President Biden before becoming chief of staff for then-Secretary Kerry at the State Department.

Yohannes Abraham, director of the Biden transition team who is to become NSC chief of staff, held substantive roles in the Obama White House and became a senior adviser at the Obama Foundation.

Brett McGurk, who will serve as overall coordinator for the Middle East at the NSC, spanned the Obama and Trump administrations as White House special envoy to the international coalition against the Islamic State, until [he quit in late 2018 in protest of Trump’s decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-envoy-to-coalition-fighting-isis-resigns-in-protest-of-trumps-syria-decision/2018/12/22/a5f42bc0-0606-11e9-b5df-5d3874f1ac36_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_26). Under Obama, McGurk also served as deputy assistant secretary of state for Iraq and Iran, working closely with Biden when he was President Barack Obama’s designated point person for negotiations with the then-struggling Iraqi government.

Rebecca Brocato was named as senior director for legislative affairs, a step up from a similar job she held in the Obama White House. Tarun Chhabra, NSC director for strategic planning under Obama, will become senior director for technology, and Juan Gonzalez is to be senior director for the Western Hemisphere, a promotion from similar jobs he held at the Obama NSC and State Department.

The incoming NSC senior director for South Asia, Sumona Guha, focused on that region in Kerry’s State Department policy-planning staff. Emily Horne, named as NSC spokesperson, was assistant press secretary at the Obama NSC.

Amanda Sloat, named senior director for Europe, held similar jobs at the State Department and White House. Andrea Kendall-Taylor, named as senior director for Russia and Central Asia, has been a senior intelligence officer on the region.

Melanie Nakagawa, to be senior director for climate and energy, advised then-Secretary Kerry on that issue.

Others have less immediate Obama-Biden administration connections. Shanthi Kalathil, who was named coordinator for democracy and human rights, directs the International Forum for Democratic Studies at the National Endowment for Democracy.

Sasha Baker, who will be senior director for strategic planning, served as national security adviser to Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and deputy policy director for Warren’s presidential campaign. Tanya Bradsher, a veteran of the Obama NSC and Department of Homeland Security, who left a job as chief of staff for Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.) to join the transition team, will serve as senior director for partnerships and global engagement.

Biden advisers and transition officials said that the presence of so many Obama veterans should be seen as an advantage rather than a source of concern, bringing years of experience in more junior jobs to leadership positions.

“The people that Biden has hired have deep experience in the agencies where they’re operating now,” said a former top Obama national security official. “I think that counts for a lot, particularly after a period when that wasn’t the case.

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“This is a generation coming up to leadership positions,” the former official said, noting that Sullivan will become the youngest White House national security adviser since McGeorge Bundy under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. “It’s a team that knows each other well. . . . They’re collegial, but I think will challenge each other” and be challenged by Biden.

In addition to long-standing ties to Biden, many have direct relationships to each other. Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, Biden’s choice as defense secretary, stands as the odd one out on the senior national security team, having spent his career in the military. But he is close to Biden, going back to the military service of Biden’s late son, Beau, who served under his military command in Iraq.