

A 100 nap

Interjú Jody Jensennel és James M. Skelly-vel

The first 100 days of Joe Biden's administration

Interview with Jody Jensen and James M. Skelly

Az új amerikai adminisztráció hivatalba lépése korszakhatár a világpolitikában. A globalizmus tartalma megváltozott, Biden világossá tette, hogy elkötelezett a globalizáció és az új világrend mellett. 2021-ben már más világban élünk. Új világ van születőben. A tudományok köre kibővült, az új tudás új állami erőcentrumokat hozott létre. A változás nyomán követhető a termelési folyamat alapvető átalakulásában. Az új termelési mód kialakítja az új életmódot. Biden Amerikája ezt észlelve cselekszik, így az ő 100 napja több, mint az Egyesült Államok sorsfordító története.

Az Egyesült Államok a világ vezető hatalma ma is, de hegemon szerepét ma már másként gyakorolja, mint a XX. vagy a XXI. század eddig eltelt időszakában., ehhez keres partnereket. Ez a folyamat különösen a technológiai fejlődésen látszik.

Az elmúlt 100 nap sikerét nem lehet levezetni az egészségügyi veszélyhelyzetre történt reagálásból.

Honlapunkon már többször is felhívtuk a figyelmet az amerikai külpolitika és gazdaságpolitika egyes elemeire. Bár a 100 nap csak 5 nap múlva ér véget, mégis fontosnak tartottuk, hogy olvasóinknak értékelést adjunk a kormányzat eddigi teljesítményéről. Ez alkalommal két szakértőt, Jody Jensent és Jim Skelley-t kértük meg arra, hogy fejtsék ki az álláspontjukat az elmúlt 100 napról. Az alábbi kérdéseket tettük fel:

1. Új korszak kezdődik-e a Biden adminisztrációval?
2. Hogyan jellemezhető az új geopolitikai környezet, amivel találkozott az új elnök?
3. Kína és Oroszország tekintetében milyen lépésekre lehet számítani az Egyesült Államok részéről?
4. Mire lehet számítani a gazdasági újjáépítés szempontjából?
5. Az amerikai társadalmon belüli feszültségeket hogyan fogja kezelni a Biden-kormányzat?

Ritter Tibor¹ – Trautmann László²

¹ közgazdász, a Köz-Gazdaság szerkesztőbizottságának titkára

² közgazdász, a Köz-Gazdaság főszerkesztője

DOI: 10.14267/RETP2021.02.01

Jody Jensen a Polányi Központ igazgatója a Felsőfokú Tanulmányok Intézetében Kőszegen, az MTA Politikatudományi Intézetének tudományos főmunkatársa, emellett nemzetközi kapcsolatokért felelős igazgató a Társadalomtudományok és Európa-tanulmányok Intézet Alapítványban (Jean Monnet Kiválósági Központ), amelynek létrehozásában is szerepet vállalt. Jody Jensen a Pannon Egyetem Kőszegi Kampuszának egyetemi docense és a nemzetközi tanulmányok mesterképzés szakvezetője. 2016 őszétől kezdődően három évre elnyerte a Jean Monnet Chair for European Solidarity and Social Cohesion (ESSCO) címet. Az Ashoka Alapítvány (vállalkozók támogatója a társadalmi innováció szolgálatában) nemzeti és regionális igazgatója volt. Rendszeresen oktat külföldön, emellett az Európai Bizottság munkájában is szerepet vállal.

James M. Skelly a kőszegi Társadalomtudományok és Európa-tanulmányok Intézete Alapítvány (ISES) munkatársa, ahol a Pannon Egyetemtől Új Közép-Európa II. kutatói ösztöndíjban részesült az „Európai identitás és állampolgárság kialakítása” projekthez. Dr. Skelly a Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies igazgatója, illetve 2012 és 2015 között a pennsylvaniai Juniata College béketanulmányok professzora volt. Ezt megelőzően az észak-írországi Ulster Egyetem béketanulmányi vendégprofesszora, valamint a béke és igazság program koordinátora volt a BCA nemzetközi oktatási szervezetnél. Az Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (Kaliforniai Egyetem), a Centre for War, Peace and the News Media (New Yorki Egyetem), valamint az Irish Peace Institute volt társigazgatója, az ausztriai Európai Békeegyetem béke és konfliktustanulmányi képzésének koordinátora, illetve a berkeley-i Kaliforniai Egyetem Nemzetközi Tanulmányok Intézetének (Institute of International Studies) vendégkutatója (1991-92) volt a MacArthur Alapítvány támogatásával.

1. There were high expectations for the new Biden administration. Is it possible to enter a new era under Pres. Biden in contrast to Trump?

Jody Jensen: Newspapers are running with titles like “Biden Boom” (*New York Times*), “Can Biden achieve an FDR-style presidency?” (*Washington Post*), “Biden Chooses Prosperity Over Vengeance” (*The Atlantic*) that reflect a general expectation of a new era dawning with the election of Joseph R. Biden, Jr. as the 46th President of the United States of America. Initial feelings of relief from the contentious Trump administration were tempered with the reality of impending challenges, especially domestically with the Covid 19 pandemic rampant and the demands of economic recovery for economically struggling Americans. Biden brought a human face to the common and immediate needs of Americans and in the first 100 days understated his pandemic relief plans so that today he can claim over 21.3% of the population (as of April 11, 2021, over 70 million people) are fully vaccinated, thus already exceeding his promise of 100 million shots by 183 million doses administered in his first 100 days.

As the domestic crises will certainly take precedence in this initial period, and as the Biden administration’s approach so far has been one of unity in adversity, this is in stark contrast to the polarizing and confrontational former administration. The president held an interesting meeting with historians like Doris Kearns Goodwin, Walter Isaacson, and others in early March at the White House. In these discussions it was reported that Biden asked questions about how much change and at what pace Americans could accept historic systemic changes. Biden is already being compared to paradigm changing presidents like FDR, and

whereas at the end of the last administration, when Trump warned of apocalyptic consequences if defeated, there is a sense of hope today moving forward.

James M. Skelly: I have no doubt that we are entering a more positive new era under President Biden in contrast to that informed by Donald Trump. During Biden's first term in the U.S. Senate, I worked in a junior position as a Special Assistant to another Democratic Senator, John Tunney, of California. The chat among our senior staff, who often worked with Biden's staff, was that Biden was personable, reliable, and steady. He sought consensus on policy questions, and was civil even while in disagreement with other Senators. As former U.S. Labor Secretary, Robert Reich, recently wrote that, Biden is "Mr Fix-it", and quotes the President as saying simply, "I got elected to solve problems".

Thus, I also think we can be assured that President Biden will not publicly call a former major supporter "a dumb son of a _____", as Trump said of Senator Mitch McConnell at a rally in Florida earlier this April!

2. One of the essential points of Biden's campaign was foreign policy which is surprising compared to former presidential campaigns. How has the geopolitical role of the U.S. changed?

How can the new administration adjust to the new global, geopolitical circumstances? How do you evaluate the first 100 days of Biden's foreign policy? What are the main challenges and how have these been dealt with so far by the new administration?

Jody Jensen: America's standing in the world was severely damaged during the Trump administration's withdrawal from major international agreements like the Paris Climate Agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Open Skies Treaty. This credibility gap was clearly evident in the contentious initial meetings in Alaska between Biden's Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan on the U.S. side, and the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and China's most senior foreign policy official, Yang Jiechi. This led to some reports of a new U.S.-China Cold War. But I will contribute more on specific foreign policy issues later.

It appears the new administration is beginning to address the credibility gap at the international level by renewing and strengthening traditional trans-Atlantic partnerships and taking a stronger stance against strong-man countries and regimes that were at the minimum mollified by Trump (Russia, North Korea, Saudi Arabia), at the expense of valuable alliances with traditional U.S. allies in the international arena. There is clearly a lot of reconstruction work that needs to be done to rebuild trust in the reliability of the U.S. as an international partner.

James M. Skelly: The geopolitical role of the U.S. has fundamentally changed since Biden has taken office, most notably in its reversal of numerous policies that the Trump administration instituted, in order for the United States to re-engage with the international community, and in some cases provide leadership. These include multiple policies on immigration, including the revocation of what was called "the Muslim Ban", rejoining the World Health Organisation, and the Paris Climate accord.

Biden has also instituted linked policies that will insure that the United States takes a "Whole-of government Approach to the Climate Crisis", that includes initiatives to "center the climate crisis in U.S. foreign policy and national security considerations", as well as appointing a Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, who was subsequently named as former U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry. As such, Kerry will

also have a seat on the National Security Council, and will attend an international “Leaders’ Climate Summit” in Washington on Earth Day, April 22, 2021, that Biden will host.

In addition, Biden has announced what I hope will be the first part of a truly significant geopolitical initiative. He has recently ordered that all U.S. troops now in Afghanistan leave by 1 September of this year. Whether or not this is the first-step in ending the U.S.’s “Forever Wars” in locations throughout the world remains to be seen, as will a more pacific approach to the resolution of conflicts be initiated by the United States. The United States has for many years maintained a military “empire”, with large and small military bases numbering around 800 in 80 countries, at a total cost of trillions of dollars. In contrast, China has one military base outside of its borders, in Djibouti. The 20 year war in Afghanistan alone has total costs for the U.S. of over \$2.261 trillion dollars, and the annual budget for the military in the United States is in excess of the military budgets of the next ten countries, and over ten times more than the military budget of Russia.

3. China and Russia need special attention. Were steps taken in the first 100 days to address these countries, and what is your forecast for the next one or two years?

Jody Jensen: As mentioned above, the initial exchange between the new U.S. administration and seasoned Chinese officials was not encouraging and very confrontational, with Chinese officials mentioning the “slaughter” of black people in the U.S. in response to U.S. accusations of human right violations of the Muslim Uyghur minority (what Blinken described as “genocide”), and the authoritarian suppression of democracy protestors in Hong Kong.

The current administration’s challenges with China are complex. As Jonathan Marcus (*BBC News*, March 17, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56382793>) put it: “How do you press China on introducing fairer trade practices, on democracy or on human rights, while still hoping to cooperate on tackling climate change and ensuring stability in the Asia-Pacific region? It is going to be all about managing strategic competition.” It is clear that the competition and the potential for conflict between the U.S. and China will likely intensify in terms of alliance-building, projected military strength, and economic and political governance models.

With regard to Russia, again, initial contact with the new Biden administration was tough and confrontational, especially after the newly elected president called Putin a “killer” – to which Russia responded by recalling its ambassador and trumpeting the U.S. legacy of Native American genocide, slavery and the bombing of Hiroshima. Subsequently, representatives from both countries suggested they would try and agree in areas of mutual interest. Most experts agree that the U.S.-Russia relationship will remain tense now and in the coming years and they speak of the priority to prevent any military confrontations, including unintended incidents, that may occur between the U.S. and its allies and Russia (*Al Jazeera*, March 19, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/as-us-russia-ties-cool-putin-offers-to-call-biden>).

James M. Skelly: As a preface, I should note that aspects of the American discourse regarding both China and Russia appears to be articulated by those political figures who are invested in notions that animated the Cold War. The journal *Foreign Policy*, for example, notes that some of Trump’s possible heirs, such as the Senators Tom Cotton, Josh Hawley, and Marco Rubio, as well as Trump’s Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, “are all stoking the fire for a new global confrontation with China”.

In the *Foreign Policy* article, which focused on Biden's National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, attention was drawn to Sullivan's participation in a project developed by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in which participants "listened to what Americans outside the Washington bubble had to say". This led to the report published by the Carnegie Endowment entitled Making U.S. Foreign Policy Work Better for the Middle Class, published last September. Biden would seem to have picked up on this theme when he gave a formal briefing on "America's Place in the World" and at the State Department's headquarters in early February. Among his comments, Biden noted:

"There's no longer a bright line between foreign and domestic policy. Every action we take in our conduct abroad, we must take with American working families in mind. Advancing a foreign policy for the middle class demands urgent focus on our domestic economic renewal."

That said, the new U.S. Secretary of State, and long time Biden foreign policy advisor, Antony Blinken, has clearly been part of the "Washington bubble" for many years, as was evident when he and his delegation engaged in their first talks with their Chinese counterparts in Alaska in mid-March. In what the BBC described as "a blunt opening statement before the talks in private", Blinken noted that the U.S. would "discuss our deep concerns with actions by China, including in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, cyber attacks on the United States, economic coercion of our allies", and that: "Each of these actions threaten the rules-based order that maintains global stability." Needless to say, the Chinese delegation hit back with a list of the United States destabilizing actions.

It would seem from Blinken's rhetoric that the increasingly discredited notion of "American exceptionalism" is still alive. Instead, it might be a useful important step if key members of Biden's staff "jettison the great power competition" narrative that Trump officials and many others have popularized, as Sharon Squassoni wrote in *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in January.

One early indication of a possible new U.S. foreign policy approach toward China was the joint statement issued by the former U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, now serving as Biden's Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, and China's Special Envoy for Climate Change, Xie Zhenhua, after their recent two-day meeting in Shanghai in mid-April. The joint statement begins by noting that, "The United States and China are committed to cooperating with each other and with other countries to tackle the climate crisis, which must be addressed with the seriousness and urgency that it demands."

Regarding Russia, it appears likely that the current "cold war" between the United States and Russia will remain primarily in cyberspace, although it may well have real world consequences. On 15 April, the final day of President Biden's first 100 days in office, his administration produced a "Fact Sheet" entitled "Imposing Costs for Harmful Foreign Activities by the Russian Government". It details the rationale for the Executive Order Biden issued regarding these activities and the various non-violent sanctions the American government is imposing. The sanctions are primarily for various activities the Russian government has supported and instituted, including imposing "costs in a strategic and economically impactful manner on Russia if it continues or escalates its destabilizing international actions".

The rationale for the sanctions are a response to the following actions the U.S. claims were instituted by Russia:

"Efforts to undermine the conduct of free and fair democratic elections and democratic institutions in the United States and its allies and partners", as well as engagement in and facilitation of "malicious cyber activities against the United States and its allies and partners"; the fostering and use of "transnational corruption to influence foreign governments"; the pursuit of "extraterritorial

activities targeting dissidents or journalists”; the undermining of “security in countries and regions important to United States national security”; and the violation of “well-established principles of international law, including respect for the territorial integrity of states”.

4. The economic policy of the Biden administration has been determined by the pandemic and economic recovery. What has the new administration done beyond the relief package? Will the Trump era tariff policy continue? And will the supply chain be shortened? Will production capacity in the U.S. be rebuilt which has been outsourced since the late '90s? If yes, then what will be the impact on the American economy and society?

Jody Jensen: In addition to the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package, a \$3 trillion green/infrastructure plan has been proposed. If successful, besides rescuing vulnerable populations in or on the edge of poverty, the infrastructure plan, like FDR’s New Deal, would stimulate the private sector to create new “green” jobs that improve productivity and economic sustainability. The infrastructure plan would be paid for by raising the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28% – a percentage that is still below what corporations paid before President Donald Trump’s tax cuts in 2017 which was 35%. The plan called the “Made in America Tax Plan” also wants to increase the minimum tax on U.S. multinational corporations to 21%, and the new Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen called for a global minimum corporate tax rate of 21% to hinder offshore holdings in tax havens. The White House estimates this plan would be paid off in 15 years. Of course, Republicans says it goes too far, and some democrats say it does not go far enough to confront the climate crisis.

James M. Skelly: In order to understand the economic policies of the Biden administration, one needs to see that it is modelled on the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who served as U.S. President during the Great Depression in the 1930’s and World War II in the early 1940’s. It may be that Biden also sees himself as a contemporary version of FDR, and thus his emphasis on an “industrial policy”. Robert Reich has pointed out that the “dirty little secret is that the U.S. already has an industrial policy, but one that’s focused on pumping up profits with industry-specific subsidies, tax loopholes and credits, bailouts and tariffs”. Therefore he argues, the “practical choice isn’t whether to have an industrial policy but whether it meets society’s needs or those of politically powerful industries”. Therefore, Reich argues further that the new industrial policy “should focus on cutting-edge breakthroughs and not be frittered away on pointless projects like the F-35 fighter jet”, with the result that “it should meet human needs rather than add to an overstuffed arsenal”.

It is not completely clear however whether Biden’s policies will help to create a more viable economy, or create one burdened by more tariffs, and a distorted supply chain but some modest progress seems to be in the air. For example, Biden’s discussion with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in early March led to their agreement “to suspend the tariffs related to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Aircraft disputes for four months and to work toward resolving these long running disputes at the WTO”. Adam Posen, the President of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, however thinks that Biden’s proposed policies are an exercise in “nostalgia”. Posen argues that, “The protectionist instinct rests on a syllogism: the populist anger that elected Trump was largely the product of economic displacement, economic displacement is largely the product of a laissez-faire approach to global competition, and therefore the best way to capture the support of populist voters is to firmly stand up against unfettered

global competition.” Instead, he claims that what the U.S. economy needs “is greater exposure to pressure from abroad, not protectionist barriers or attempts to rescue specific industries in specific places”.

5. Enormous tensions are features of American society today. How does this effect the new administration? Public health policies are one aspect of rising tensions. From this perspective, do you think that the role of the government will increase or decrease in the coming years? How long will populism influence politics in the U.S.?

Jody Jensen: From the outset, the rhetoric of the new administration in domestic affairs emphasized collective action for the public good. The underlying tensions in American society will remain for a long, long time. However, if the most marginalized groups gain access to vaccinations, one part of one problem will begin to be addressed. Besides the pandemic and economic fallout, the situation of migrants at the border is acute and compelling and needs to be addressed in new legislation and humane border policies. It is clear, that in terms of the Biden administration, the role of government, hopefully good government, is due to increase in response to the structural crises the U.S. faces today.

As Erza Klein points out in a recent *New York Times* opinion piece (“Four Ways of Looking at the Radicalism of Joe Biden”, April 8, 2021), the Republican Party has essentially collapsed as a potential negotiating partner negating any kind of bi-partisanship hope to mitigate the current crises. That is why Biden is concentrating on implementing policies that are attractive and beneficial to everyday Americans on a broader political spectrum (like the \$1,400 stimulus checks) which includes Republican voters, thereby bypassing the need for any kind of consensus-building between Democrats and Republicans in government.

The underlying strains of racial and economic injustice, juxtaposed on horrific gun violence, can only be met with reforms of judicial, policing and gun policies. The new social movements like BLM highlight abuses, and the results of the ongoing trial of police officer Derek Chauvin in the killing of George Floyd will have national, if not international, repercussions which ever way it goes. The truth is that American society has changed and is still changing. It is no longer represented by a majority of whites of European extraction, thus the efforts to curtail the voting rights in predominantly non-white voting populations as well as in predominantly anti-Republican districts. Republicans, who have not won the popular vote in 3 past presidential elections understand that their hold on power requires dis-enfranchizing large sections of the country. Until a transparent and just system replaces the gerrymandered voter districts, and the limitations to access to voting (as in Georgia recently) are eliminated, populism on all sides will flourish. Until a transparent and just system of representation is implemented and obvious at all levels (local, state, national), until the influence of big money and corporations on politics is regulated, and until stakeholders (politicians, the media, corporations) are held accountable, trust in the democratic system in the U.S. will be crippled and jeopardized.

The latest report of the National Intelligence Council, part of the U.S. Intelligence Community, entitled “Global Trends 2040. A More Contested World” (March 2021), states that as people gravitate to like-minded groups and make increasing and varied demands on already strained governments, democracies will become more vulnerable. The report continues that this mismatch between government abilities and public expectations could lead to more political volatility and internal conflicts, polarisation and populism with resultant waves of activism and protest. Two future scenarios stand out in the report: “The World Adrift” scenario imagines that market economies will never recover from the Covid pandemic, reflected in increasingly divided societies that exist in an international system that is “directionless, chaotic and volatile”

where international rules and institutions are ignored by major stakeholders (national governments, corporations and other actors). Another scenario, "Tragedy and Mobilisation", depicts a world in the midst of global climate catastrophe in the early 2030s with rampant famine and unrest that leads to a new global coalition of social movements to address the crises.

Whatever the future holds, whatever disruptions may occur as a result of internal and external stimuli – especially the challenges of climate-related factors – the role of all international big powers will be determined by how well they are able to mitigate and navigate the waves of continuing crises and uncertainty. There is a fragile but palpable sense in the U.S. today that some current challenges are, at least initially, being effectively addressed (Covid, the economy) by the new administration, but whether this feeling will remain over the administration's tenure is anyone's guess.

James M. Skelly: There are indeed enormous tensions in American society much of which is fostered by new and widespread forms of ignorance and spread through the social media that have become dominant in the last 30 years. The author of the book, *Fantasy Land: How America Went Haywire*, Kurt Andersen, captures significant aspects of the phenomenon with the phrase "cognitive liberty," or essentially that you can believe what ever you want to believe!

I was therefore not surprised, and I'm sure Andersen wasn't as well, when we saw the numbers of people who believed that Donald Trump won the 2020 election for U.S. President. According to the [Pew Research Center](#): "Among Trump voters, 40% say he "definitely" won and another 36% say he "probably" won the election." So, somewhere close to 50 million voters thought Trump definitely or probably won the election for President!

In addition to cognitive liberty, the democratic culture of societies throughout the world is being fundamentally undermined by what Shoshana Zuboff of Harvard University calls the "[surveillance capitalism](#)" of the new social media companies. Zuboff's essay in The New York Times in late January, "[The Coup We Are Not Talking About](#)", captures the depth of the problem when she suggests at the very end of her essay that "We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have surveillance society, but we cannot have both."