

US in transition: 2 presidents, 2 policies, 1 superpower

BY PETER BAKER
NYT News Service

WASHINGTON

The old adage about the interregnum between an election and an inauguration is that there is only one president at a time. Try telling that to the rest of the world now.

While one president, the one actually still living in the White House, attends international summit meetings and brokers a Middle East cease-fire to cap his tenure, another president, the one who has not actually taken office yet, is busy conducting a foreign policy of his own from his Spanish-tiled Florida estate.

Without waiting to be sworn in, President-elect Donald Trump effectively declared a trade war this week by announcing that he would impose tariffs on America's friends, Canada and Mexico, as well as its rival China on Day One of his administration. The next day, President Joe Biden strode into the Rose Garden to announce an agreement to end more than a year of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

This is America in the time of transition, making peace and declaring war, all in the same 24-hour news cycle — two presidents leading the country



TIERNEY L. CROSS The New York Times

The White House in Washington on Election Day, Nov. 5. While President Joe Biden is attending international summit meetings and brokers a Middle East cease-fire to cap his tenure, President-elect Donald Trump is busy conducting a foreign policy of his own.

in two different directions, one officially, the other unofficially; one representing the past and present, the other the future. Whipsawed and maybe just a little confused, foreign leaders are left to calculate whether it makes sense to try to get something done with the outgoing leader or brace for the reality of his successor.

"Transitions always result in a momentum shift to the new team, but this time around feels more pronounced than any transition in recent memory," said Suzanne Maloney, director of the foreign policy program at the Brookings Institution in Washington and a former State Department ad-

viser.

"Leaders in capitals around the world are trying to take advantage of the moment to try to curry favor with Trump himself at a time when it may still be possible to shape his agenda," she added. And Trump's "inner circle is dismissive of the traditional Washington protocols that might suggest some discretion during the transition."

The tariff threats may just be an opening bargaining position as Trump seeks leverage to force trading partners to halt the flow of migrants and drugs, but they underscored how much has changed since the election. Before Trump's arriv-

al on the political stage, presidents of both parties had spent decades bringing down trade barriers, but the president-elect has made clear he intends to build them back up again.

In targeting Canada, Mexico and China, Trump picked America's three largest trading partners, signaling a new period of friction at odds with Biden's efforts over the past four years to get along. The announcements quickly scrambled economic calculations across the hemisphere and across the ocean, forcing foreign capitals to consider whether to negotiate or retaliate.

The consequences could be enormous. Tariffs are essentially taxes on imported goods and will largely be passed along to consumers. So if Trump follows through — and it is possible this is mainly a bluff to force trading partners to compromise — Americans still reeling from the inflation of Biden's tenure could face a renewed round of inflation during Trump's tenure.

Daniel M. Price, who was an international economics adviser to President George W. Bush, said Trump appeared to be using the tariff threats to extract concessions. "This isn't a surprise, as it's what he said on the campaign trail," Price said. "He's looking for offers of ap-

peasement from his targets to mitigate any tariffs."

Trump is not confining his pre-inauguration international dealings to economics. He authorized his billionaire financial patron Elon Musk to open discussions with Iran, bypassing the current administration, which is laboring to manage a precarious standoff between the Islamic republic and Israel. Trump has vowed to end Russia's war in Ukraine before the inauguration, a task that he says without embarrassment or explanation should take him a mere 24 hours when he gets around to it. By one account, he has even had a phone conversation with President Vladimir Putin of Russia, although the Kremlin denied it.

Rep. Michael Waltz, the Republican from Florida tapped to serve as Trump's national security adviser, insisted that the incoming president was not trying to work in conflict with the current one, noting that he has met with Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser.

"Jake Sullivan and I have had discussions. We've met," Waltz said on "Fox News Sunday" over the weekend. "For our adversaries out there that think this is a time of opportunity that they can play one administration off the other, they're wrong and we are hand in glove. We are one team with the United States in this transition."

But that moment of bipartisan solidarity did not last long. As soon as

Biden announced the cease-fire that he brokered after months of painstaking negotiations, Waltz tried to claim credit for Trump, who had no role in the talks.

"Everyone is coming to the table because of President Trump," Waltz wrote on social media. "His resounding victory sent a clear message to the rest of the world that chaos won't be tolerated. I'm glad to see concrete steps towards deescalation in the Middle East."

In fact, the Biden and Trump teams have had only glancing consultations since the election because the president-elect refused for weeks to sign memorandums of understanding on how to handle the transition with the federal government. In part because of that, Secretary of State Antony Blinken had spoken with Sen. Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican who is Trump's pick for that post, but had not been able to sit down in person.

Amos Hochstein, Biden's envoy negotiating Middle East peace, briefed Trump's aides on his talks to end the fighting in Lebanon shortly after the Nov. 5 election and then again this week when an agreement was imminent. He came away convinced that the Trump team supported the Biden administration's approach, if only because it would benefit Israel, according to a senior administration official who insisted on anonymity to discuss conversations between the two camps.

FROM PAGE 1A

PROPERTY TAX

it's dead capital. D-E-A-D with an exclamation point. It's never going to go anywhere," County Commissioner Jim Howell said. "It's dead because I'm not going to advocate for it when people call it a tax increase."

Sedgwick County is also seeking buy-in from several other cities as it looks for areas where property taxes could be lowered — mainly by asking the county's 19 other cities to lower their mill levies in exchange for some revenue from the new sales tax.

That conversation is still up in the air, but Baty said the county is also looking at areas where it can consolidate with other cities, including Wichita, which expects a several million-dollar deficit in the coming years, in order to save money.

Baty invited the cities

for a meeting in August and plans another one in December.

"Let's see if there's better ways to collaborate, and if there's ways we can jointly work together to lower the cost of government and reduce property taxes."

SHIFTING COUNTY SALES TAX MONEY

As talks continue with other cities about a possible sales tax and lowering property taxes, Sedgwick County is looking at its own tax policies.

The county already levies a one percent sales tax, approved by voters in 1985.

Half of the annual revenue from that tax, about \$18 million, goes to pay for roads and other infrastructure costs across the county. The other half goes to the general fund. Howell said that has pre-



JAIME GREEN The Wichita Eagle

A neighborhood near 119th St. and Central. Tax appraisals are up this year for 80% of Sedgwick County's 182,800 residential parcels, the county appraiser told the County Commission. The average increase in value is 10%.

vented the county from going to a higher mill levy.

"If it wasn't for the sales tax being poured into [the

general fund]," Howell said, "we would still be funding those things, but we'd have to do it com-

pletely from property tax."

Now, commissioners will vote Wednesday whether that half in the

general fund should go toward quality of life programs instead of using property taxes to pay for them.

"I knock on doors running for this office," Howell said. "If I tell them not one penny of your property taxes funds anything other than core functions of government, it satisfies them."

That move won't bring in property tax relief for residents, though, since the money is already used for property tax relief.

"I believe that property taxes should only be used for core services of county government, so primarily public safety, public health and public works," Baty said. "This is about being consistent to the things I've been saying about what property tax dollars should be used for, and what sales tax dollars should be used for."

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FROM PAGE 1A

NOTRE DAME

Friday to address an assembly of over half of the 2,000 workers and craftsmen from around France — and beyond — who contributed to the cathedral's reconstruction.

The April 2019 fire completely destroyed Notre Dame's wooden roofing — a lattice of ancient medieval beams known as "the forest" — and its lead covering, which went up in toxic smoke.

The cathedral's spire, a 19th-century addition, crashed through the vaults

and slammed charred debris into the ground below. The cathedral was drenched in water used by firefighters to stop the blaze. Gables were threatening to topple.

"The damage was indeed considerable," Philippe Villeneuve, the chief architect in charge of Notre Dame's reconstruction, told Macron as he showed him before and after pictures of the cathedral's interior. But the rest of the cathedral, like the great organ and the iconic stained glass windows,

were "miraculously protected," Villeneuve said.

"There was hope," he added. "That's when I thought that the five-year deadline — which was an obsession for all of us from the beginning — seemed feasible to me."

Macron started his tour in the plaza in front of the cathedral, which is also in the process of being redesigned to open it up toward the Seine River and to help millions of visitors flow through more easily and comfortably by mitigating the effects of climate change.

Renovation of the cathedral's exterior will continue for several more years.

Inside, the forest of

scaffolding that had been erected after the blaze was gone on Friday. Macron was taken up into the new attic and to the base of the new spire. Like the rest of the cathedral, it was rebuilt so that it is nearly identical to the pre-fire structure, using over 2,000 oak trees from around France.

"Each piece is unique, and each piece is made with one tree," Jean-Louis Bidet, the technical director of Ateliers Perrault, the company that built the choir roofing, told Macron as he showed him the ax traces left on beams that were hewed by hand, like in the Middle Ages.

The cathedral will re-

open next week during an official ceremony, broadcast to the world, followed by a string of Masses, concerts and other events.

About 15 million yearly visitors are expected at Notre Dame, which was already among the world's most visited monuments before the fire.

The investigation into the cause of the 2019 blaze is continuing, but a definitive cause may never be determined. The leading theories among investigators are that it was sparked by an electrical short-circuit or a discarded cigarette.

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