

The Trump/Biden Handoff: Back to Business as Usual, as Usual

Few will find it surprising that the incoming Biden administration looks, in both form and function, a lot like the Obama administration of 2009-2017. After all, Joe Biden served as Barack Obama's vice-president for those eight years. His staff and cabinet appointments comprise a veritable Who's Who of Obama holdovers and members of Biden's own political circle, built over decades in the Senate and White House.

Some might, however, be surprised to at how closely Biden's administration will likely resemble outgoing President Donald Trump's, both personnel- and policy-wise. The new boss looks a lot like the old boss, minus a flair for the melodramatic. And the old boss looked a lot like the older boss, too.

Trump's 2016 campaign, and his actions in office, were a classic case of multiple personality disorder.

He ran on "draining the swamp," all the while recruiting support from, then staffing up with, the usual gang of ward-heelers and lobbyists.

He ran on a less interventionist foreign policy, when he wasn't bragging about being "the most militaristic" candidate and promising to "rebuild" an already bloated military. Then he escalated every war he inherited from his predecessor (and re-booted the old US war in Somalia), after which he tried to pass off his draw-downs to 2016 troop levels in Syria and Afghanistan as "withdrawing" and did his damndest to bait Iran into a new war.

He ran on cutting taxes. His income tax cuts were intended to be temporary (the bill doubled the standard deduction for two years while eliminating the personal exemption permanently — Congress made things permanent later), included a "soak the rich" scheme (the State And Local Tax deduction cap), and were more than eclipsed by the tariffs he levied on American buyers of foreign goods to "protect" the American industries with the most effective lobbyists.

He ran on cutting regulations, and issued an executive order that he claimed required federal bureaucracies to repeal two regulations for each new one. It really only required those bureaucracies to "identify" two regulations "for" repeal, not actually repeal them. As of three days before his inauguration, the Federal Register included 1,079,651 regulations. On December 31, 2020, that number was 1,090,371.

He ran on cutting entitlements and "welfare," then presided over the highest levels of both since the New Deal. Not reluctantly, but joyfully. And not solely due to the COVID-19

pandemic, but starting with lavish farm subsidies to off-set the damage his trade wars did to American agriculture.

On the “culture war” side, his embrace of identity politics differed from the American pseudo-“left” version only in terms of the complexions, sexual orientations, and gender identities of those he championed versus those he condemned.

Even on his signature issue, immigration, he came in second — behind Barack Obama and Joe Biden — on numbers of immigrants deported.

The differences between Donald Trump and Joe Biden are and always have been soap opera differences rather than substantive differences. Americans looking for more freedom from either were and are looking in the wrong places. Business as usual never paused.