Twitter Thread by William Yang

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Latest: The Trump administration made a series of surprising moves regarding Asia policy over the last week, while @JoeBiden revealed the candidate for the new role overseeing Indo-Pacific region. I talked to @kharisborloff about what these mean:

"With less than a week from leaving the office, the Trump administration has been making some major moves regarding Washington's policies for Asia Pacific."

"On January 9, U.S. Secretary State Mike Pompeo announced that the U.S. would scrap all existing limitations on interaction between Taiwanese and U.S. officials and on January 12, the White House declassified a security paper related to the Indo-Pacific Strategy."

"Some experts think that the Trump administration's latest move to declassify the national security paper is to put the Biden administration on the spot."

"Kharis Templeman, an advisor to the Project on Taiwan and Indo-Pacific at Stanford University's Hoover Institute, said following the declassification, if the Biden administration wants to disavow parts of the Indo-Pacific strategy in the future, they will have to do it publicly.

"The political logic is to try to tie up the Biden administration's hands a bit," Templeman said. "There will be political cost if the Biden administration change things from what the Trump administration did."

And based on the declassified part of the Indo-Pacific strategy, Templeman thinks it shows that the Trump administration's Asia policy has fundamentally changed the consensus about China in the U.S.

"The administration fundamentally shifted how American policy makers think about China," Templeman explained. "It went from China is a 'a rising power that we need to find ways to work with and make some concessions to keep the relationship run smoothly' to ...

... China is 'a potential near-peer competitor and a possible threat to U.S. interests around the world.'"

Templeman thinks there is a bipartisan consensus that China is a competitor and possible threat to U.S. interests worldwide.

However, Trump's habit of announcing his plan to handle major foreign policy issues on Twitter often contradicts with what his national security team would like to do.

"Trump had a way to blow things up with a tweet, which creates a lot of diplomatic problems that require people lower down in the national security community to try to massage or mitigate," Kharis told me.

Despite these challenges, Templeman views the Indo-Pacific strategy as a significant and coherent paper that matches what the Biden administration would seek to do.

In the declassified document, the White House specifically emphasizes the importance for the U.S. to implement a defense strategy that can deny China sustained air and sea dominance inside the first island chain in a war.

It also highlighted the importance of ensuring the security of U.S. allies, including Taiwan. Templeman explains that if U.S. allies can secure key positions on the first island chain, it will be much harder for the Chinese to project hard military power outward.

"If Taiwan is not under Beijing's control, it will be very hard for the Chinese to send submarines out to the western Pacific. It's an easier problem to deal with if the Chinese were not operating from many of the islands in the First Island Chain than if they are," said Kharis.

He also points out that the reason why Taiwan occupies an important position on the first island chain is because if Beijing took control of Taiwan, it could pose serious threat to other U.S. allies in the region.

"If China occupies Taiwan, the security threats against Japan becomes dire," Templeman explained. "Taiwan takes up a much larger symbolic meaning of the U.S. demonstration of commitment to other allies."

Meanwhile, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's transition team announced last week that the incoming administration will appoint former top U.S. diplomat for Asia Kirt Campbell as the White House coordinator for the Indo-Pacific region.

This is a new role that Biden created within the National Security Council. The role will cover relationship with China and other U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region.

Templeman thinks that Campbell was in charge of foreign policy issues related to Asia during the Obama administration and he has worked with many allies and partners in Asia in his previous stints in government.

"He has a reputation as a real pragmatist on issues involving China, and he has tremendous amount of experience from previous administrations," Templeman said. "He has a good reputation in Asia and he knows China well."

Templeman thinks the creation of the role focusing on the Indo-Pacific region inside the National Security Council can sway some concerns regarding Biden's initial appointment of key roles concerning foreign policy and defense.

"Campbell will be joined by a lot of people who hold similar views regarding Asia and these people are clear-eyed about the challenges that the U.S. faces in their relationship with China.

They will try to take a practical approach to mitigate the weaknesses and exploit our advantages."

Mandarin version of the report for @dw_chinese ■■■■■■https://t.co/1Y9HA1jA3o