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By Robert Burns, Lolita C. Baldor and Amer Madhani

Biden calls for China review during first Pentagon visit

Байден закликає переглянути стратегію щодо Китаю під час першого візиту до Пентагону

Президент США Джо Байден оголосив про плани перегляду Пентагоном стратегії національної безпеки щодо Китаю в рамках його зусиль щодо калібрування підходу США до Пекіну. Д. Байден закликає створити нову робочу групу для перегляду стратегії, оскільки нова адміністрація демонструє дедалі більше визнання того, що США стикаються із зростаючими викликами модернізованої та більш наполегливої армії Китаю.

Президент оголосив про перегляд під час свого першого візиту до Пентагону як головнокомандуючий. Представники Міністерства оборони описали стратегію як "спринтерські" зусилля, які зважуватимуть розвідку США, рівень військ у регіоні, оборонні союзи з Китаєм тощо. Д. Байден сказав, що цільова група даватиме рекомендації міністру оборони Ллойдю Остіну, "щоб ми могли прокласти потужний шлях уперед щодо питань, пов'язаних з Китаєм".

<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-biden-cabinet-lloyd-austin-coronavirus-pandemic-43210adc097451c97a400cfe6d35be15>



President Joe Biden speaks as Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Vice President Kamala Harris accompany him at the Pentagon, Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2021, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon, Pool)

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced plans for a Pentagon review of national security strategy on China as part of his push to recalibrate the U.S. approach with Beijing.

Biden's call for a new task force to review strategy comes as the new administration shows growing recognition that the U.S. faces increasing challenges posed by China's modernized and more assertive military.

The president announced the review during his first visit to the Pentagon as commander in chief. Defense Department officials described the review as a "sprint" effort that would weigh U.S. intelligence, troops levels in the region, defense alliances with China and more.

Biden said the task force would make recommendations to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin “so that we can chart a strong path forward on China-related matters.” He announced the task force in an address to the Pentagon workforce after he and Vice President Kamala Harris met with Defense Department brass Wednesday afternoon.

Biden is determined to depart from President Donald Trump’s approach to China — a relationship that placed economic and trade concerns above all else and then hit a wall after the coronavirus pandemic.

The task force is to present its findings to Austin within four months. No final public report is anticipated, but Pentagon officials will discuss recommendations with Congress and others.

At his Senate confirmation hearing last month, Austin said he agreed with a recent Pentagon report that said China’s ambition is to develop a military that is equal to, and in some respects superior to, that of the United States by 2050.

“While that may be their goal, I would ... intend to make sure that never happens,” Austin said.

Last week, Austin also announced a “global posture review” that he said will make sure that the military’s presence around the world “aligns with our national interests” and ensure “we have the right capabilities in the right places.” The Pentagon also does an annual report on the state of China’s military.

Austin has tapped Ely Ratner, a top Pentagon adviser, to lead the review. Ratner served as deputy national security adviser to Biden as vice president and also served as a China specialist during the Obama administration.

Biden is taking early stock of the military as it pivots from the turmoil of the Trump years and focuses to an unusual degree on domestic and internal issues.

As defense leaders await direction from Biden on possible new approaches to overseas security threats, Austin is treating the coronavirus pandemic as a top priority and ordering fresh assessments of how to root out sexual assault and extremism in the military’s ranks.

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On his first day in office, Austin issued a message to the force that emphasized his commitment to finding ways the military can help the government move “further and faster” to fight the pandemic. Already there are more than 24,000 National Guard members providing logistical support for the vaccine program and giving as many as 50,000 shots per day.

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Last week, the Pentagon announced it will deploy more than 1,100 troops to five vaccination centers at the request of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This marks the first wave of increased military support for the national vaccination campaign.

The military is preparing to deploy the first team of about 222 service members to a vaccination center in California, and it says it is ready to deploy four similar teams to other centers when FEMA is ready. FEMA has asked the Pentagon to supply as many as 10,000 troops to staff 100 centers, but Austin is approving the teams incrementally as the locations are identified.

Biden, in a brief exchange with reporters after his remarks, declined to say whether he would seek to take action against China for its handling of the pandemic. The virus first emerged in the country's Wuhan province, and Trump blamed China for its rapid spread.

The World Health Organization in a report released this week said it was "extremely unlikely" that the coronavirus leaked from a lab in Wuhan. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Tuesday that the Biden administration would hold off on commenting on the WHO report until it has time to review the findings.

"I'm interested in getting all the facts," Biden said.

The president, while at the Pentagon, also took a tour of the African Americans in Service Corridor, an exhibit honoring Black service members.

The new defense secretary, Austin, is the first African American Pentagon chief.

AP Writer Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report.