

## **US will step up its game in Southeast Asia: Kurt Campbell**

**Biden administration to deepen engagement through vaccines and infrastructure**

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NEW YORK -- The Biden administration will "step up our game substantially" with regards to Southeast Asia diplomacy, understanding that engagement with that region is key to successful Indo-Pacific policy, Kurt Campbell, the Indo-Pacific coordinator at the U.S. National Security Council, said Tuesday.

"We recognize fully that really for an effective Asia strategy, for an effective Indo-Pacific approach, you must do more in Southeast Asia," Campbell said in a morning webinar appearance at the Asia Society.

The administration's Southeast Asia game plan has been hampered by the cancellation of the Shangri-La Dialogue, which draws top level military officials, diplomats and weapons makers from around the world, and that other regional summits later in the year look to be held virtually, Campbell noted. But, he said that through vaccine gifting and new funding for infrastructure, the U.S. seeks to engage in a sustained way.

"We've taken it on board with our own vaccine programs, but also working with the Quad. We are deeply engaged to ensure that we will provide vaccines in 2022 to Southeast Asia and the Pacific. We think this is the most important contribution that we can make in the next little while," he said.

On infrastructure, Campbell said, "We're looking carefully at how we apply elements of the Build Back Better World set of commitments made in Europe last month," pointing to the infrastructure initiative U.S. President Joe Biden and fellow leaders of the Group of Seven rich nations launched at the Cornwall, U.K., summit.

He said that will include leveraging new finance arrangements for infrastructure at the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation.

"You will see later this year when the president hosts the Quad leaders in Washington, you'll see some commitments that will be, I hope, exciting, I think, decisive with respect to not only continuation of vaccine diplomacy, but infrastructure as well," he said pointing to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the U.S., Japan, India and Australia.

On the threat China poses, Campbell said, "Coming back in, I was astonished by some of the things I read, saw and experienced and have had diplomatic engagements about. And one of them is just undeniable: A very assertive determined China that wants to play the leading role on the global stage, and has really quite unsentimental views of United States and really wants to reshape the operating system of Asia."

To counter this challenge, the Biden administration has made Asia the center of its regional focus, Campbell said. "You'll see this movement from the Middle East, and it will be painful, in

all likelihood. We'll see some real challenges in places like Afghanistan, but a much greater focus on the Indo-Pacific."

Campbell said the challenge for the U.S. would be to come up with a strategy that presents China with opportunities, but also a response if it takes steps "antithetical to the maintenance of peace and stability."

On Taiwan, meanwhile, Campbell made clear that the Biden administration has no intention of changing the status quo.

"We support a strong unofficial relationship with Taiwan. We do not support Taiwan independence," he said.

"We fully recognize and understand the sensitivities involved here," he said. "We do believe that Taiwan has a right to live in peace. We want to see its international role, particularly in areas like vaccines and issues associated with the pandemic, they should have a role to play here, they should not be shunned in the international community."

Asked when he expected a first meeting between Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping and whether this could come at the G-20 summit in October, Campbell replied: "My expectation will be that we'll have some sort of engagement before too long."