



Biden's Jewish A-Team

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden has appointed a strong, experienced team for his new administration. Among them are a minyan and a half of Jews. Indeed, I wonder if there has ever been a more Jewish US administration – and as well, a full minyan of strongly liberal Catholics, including Biden himself. Here are the 15 Jews who comprise Biden's Jewish A-team. I strongly believe that a vigorous American presence in world affairs, spearheaded by the Jewish A-Team, is in Israel's long-term interest, more than an "America first" administration that made the US largely irrelevant in global affairs.

- **Anthony Blinken**, secretary of state. Blinken is a veteran career diplomat. His stepfather, Samuel Pizar, was the only Holocaust survivor of some 900 children in his Polish school; he was rescued after fleeing from a Nazi death march and finding refuge in a US armed corps tank – an episode Blinken recounted movingly when Biden introduced him.
- **David Cohen**, deputy CIA director. Cohen returns to this role after filling it from 2015 to 2017. Cohen is the son of a prominent Boston Jewish physician.
- **Janet Yellen**, secretary of the Treasury. She is the first woman to fill this role; previously, she headed the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. A 2016 Trump attack ad featured three Jews, including Yellen, and reflected anti-Semitic tropes. She is a renowned labor economist.
- **Merrick Garland**, attorney-general. Garland was blocked from becoming a Supreme Court Justice by then-Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, in the last year of the Obama presidency. After being nominated Garland spoke of his grandparents, who fled antisemitism in Europe and moved to the US.
- **Avril Haines**, director of national intelligence. She was deputy director of the CIA under Obama, the first woman to hold this job. Her mother was a well-known Jewish painter, Adrian Rappin (Rappaport) and Haines identifies with Israel; she visited Israel with her non-Jewish father.
- **Ron Klain**, chief of staff. He was Biden's chief of staff in his vice presidential days. Klain speaks of his childhood synagogue in Indianapolis, where he learned multiple Torah portions for his bar mitzvah, and of his commitment to raising Jewish children.
- **Eric Lander**, director, Office of Science & Technology Policy. Lander is a leading geneticist. His position has been elevated to Cabinet level. Lander has spoken of being the subject of antisemitic criticism by James Watson, discoverer of the DNA double helix.
- **Rachel Levine**, deputy secretary, Health and Human Services. Levine grew up in a Conservative Jewish home in Massachusetts. She is the first open transgender person to be nominated for a position requiring Senate confirmation.
- **Alejandro Mayorkas**, secretary of Homeland Security. Mayorkas, 60, was the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security under Obama. He was born in Cuba, to a Cuban Jewish father and Romanian Jewish mother who survived the Shoah. He has worked closely with Jewish groups in the past.
- **Anne Neuberger**, director of cybersecurity, National Security Agency. She is an Orthodox Jew, from Brooklyn, educated through college in Orthodox schools. She helped establish the US Cyber Command and led security efforts in the 2018 midterm elections. Her grandparents are Holocaust survivors and her parents were among the passengers on the Air France flight in 1976, kidnapped to Uganda and rescued in Israel's Entebbe operation. She found-



ed Sister to Sister, an NGO that serves single mothers across the US.

- **Wendy Sherman**, deputy secretary of state. She was born in Maryland to a Jewish family. Her father served in the Marines. She will be the first woman to be appointed Deputy Secretary of State. A career diplomat, she was the lead negotiator for the controversial Iran nuclear deal.
- **Jeff Zients**, COVID-19 coordinator. He was born in Washington, DC, and was raised in Kensington, Maryland. His family is Jewish. From 2014 through 2017 he was the director of the National Economic Council. He will fill the crucial role of directing and coordinating efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Rochelle Walensky**, director, Center for Disease Control. She and her husband are members of Temple Emanuel, in Newton, Massachusetts, a prominent Conservative synagogue. She is an expert on AIDS and HIV and served as Chief of Infectious Diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital, and professor at Harvard Medical School.



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US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, with his wife Evan Ryan at his side, is ceremonially sworn in by US Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House on January 27

- **Jared Bernstein**, member, Council of Economic Advisors. Under Obama, Bernstein was the chief economist and economic adviser to Biden.

- **Douglas Emhoff**, second gentleman, husband of US Vice President Kamala Harris. He is the first-ever husband of a US Vice President. He was born in Brooklyn, son of Jewish parents Barbara and Michael Emhoff. He grew up in New Jersey. He is an entertainment lawyer and teaches at Georgetown University Law Center.

This completes the 15 Jews in senior positions in the Biden administration. And, just for interest, here are the ten Catholics among Biden's appointees, also a possible all-time high.

Foremost, Biden himself, a church-going liberal Catholic; Gen. Lloyd Austin, already



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US President Joe Biden and Kamala Harris meet with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in the Oval Office on January 29

been confirmed as secretary of defense; Deb Haaland, Interior; Tom Vilsack, Agriculture; Gina Raimondo, Commerce; Marty Walsh, Labor; Denis McDonough, Veterans Affairs; Jennifer Granholm, Energy; Xavier Becerra, Health and Human Services; and John Kerry, presidential envoy for climate.

To be fair, the Trump administration, too, had many Jews in senior positions. Among them: Jared Kushner, son-in-law and senior advisor; Elliot Abrams Special representative for Venezuela, then Iran; David Friedman, Ambassador to Israel; Jason Greenblatt, Special Representative for International Negotiations, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict; Steve Mnuchin, Secretary of the Treasury; Stephen Miller, Senior Advisor, Policy; Gary Cohn, Director, White House National Economic Council; Reed Cordish, Assistant to the President, Intragovernmental and Technology Initiatives; Avrahm Berkowitz, Deputy Advisor to the President; Rod Rosenstein, Deputy Attorney General; Elan Carr, Special Envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism; Jeffrey

Rosen, Attorney General; Morgan Ortogus, Spokesperson, State Department; David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Lawrence Kudlow, Director National Economic Council; Ivanka Trump, daughter, Advisor to the President; John Eisenberg, National Security Council Legal; Ezra Cohen-Watnick, Acting Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; Len Khodorkovsky, also Deputy Special Envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism.

It will be fascinating to watch how a strongly liberal Jewish-Catholic administration operates. There is considerable irony attached to it, because the non-religious, irreligious Trump, who famously held a Bible upside down, was and is fanatically supported by Evangelical Christians, who were and who remain a key part of his base. ■

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