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**1. Brookings**

**What does Biden’s first 100 days tell us about his approach to China?
Monday, April 26, 2021**

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2021/04/26/what-does-bidens-first-100-days-tell-us-about-his-approach-to-china/>

**Competition**

A third area of continuity is in the economic realm. Candidate Biden criticized Trump’s tariffs aimed at China as a poorly targeted instrument that hurts the American economy (a Federal Reserve study found that they cost us more than 100,000 jobs). Nevertheless, the new administration is leaving the tariffs in place for the moment, as well as the “Phase 1” trade deal in which China agreed to make large purchases of specific American products (soybeans and other agricultural products, oil and gas, manufactures). This is a two-year agreement which at the mid-point is achieving mixed results. U.S. exports to China are up and are a rare bright spot in U.S. trade, but the amounts will fall far short of the agreed targets. USTR (United States Trade Representative) Katherine Tai has indicated a willingness to negotiate with China, but there are no talks planned and a lack of high-level appointees in the Trade Representative’s Office, Treasury, and Commerce who would be needed for comprehensive economic discussions.

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Technology has been emphasized by the new administration as an area of competition with China. Biden’s language has been more about seeing China as a competitor than as treating China as an adversary. The administration is proposing ambitious spending on infrastructure, broadly defined to include more funds for R&D and targeting of particular technologies, and further spending on family-friendly policies such as universal pre-K, improved health services, and support to taking care of the aged. In the administration and in Congress much of this is defended as needed to compete with China and to prevent China from dominating the technologies of the future. These efforts to increase innovation in the U.S. are complemented by various efforts to limit diffusion of technology to China via export and investment restrictions. These policies started under Trump and have been modestly expanded under Biden. Treasury and Commerce Departments are reviewing these sanctions and there may be some modest fine-tuning once the reviews are over.

**Cooperation**

The only real area of cooperation between China and the U.S. so far is that President Xi Jinping was one of the dozens of heads of state who participated in Biden’s virtual climate summit on April 22. Xi recently announced the goal of carbon neutrality by 2060, a less ambitious target than the 2050 date set by Biden, the EU, and Japan. Xi did not use the event to alter China’s recent pledge, but stressed that the rich countries have a special obligation to reduce carbon emissions quickly and to provide promised financing to assist the developing world adjust to a low-carbon future. The summit was a useful pressure point in advance of the UN climate summit in Glasgow in November. Climate could be an area of cooperation between China and the West, though it could also devolve into a new competition as the U.S. administration pressures China to set more ambitious targets, to get serious about them in the current five-year plan, and to stop financing coal-fired power plants throughout the developing world as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

What we have learned from the first 100 days is that we are likely to have both a confrontational and competitive relationship with China, similar to Trump’s policy but with some important nuances. President Biden has emphasized rebuilding partnerships with allies in order to counter China. The allies welcome the return of the U.S. to multilateralism, but most of them are not interested in a new Cold War. This was evident in Blinken’s visit to South Korea, initial discussions with European allies, and the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Suga to Washington. Our allies have deeper trade and investment relations with China than we do; and, in fact, since Biden’s election the EU, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and ASEAN have all signed new economic agreements with China. There is some contradiction between the U.S. confronting China and working multilaterally, so it is likely that over time Biden’s China policy will have to become either less confrontational or more unilateral.

**2. Council on Foreign relations(CFR)**

**The Belt and Road Initiative: Forcing Europe to Reckon with China?**

**April 27, 2021**

https://www.cfr.org/blog/belt-and-road-initiative-forcing-europe-reckon-china

When the small nation of Montenegro approached the European Union (EU) for [help paying off a nearly $1 billion loan](https://www.ft.com/content/3dd7a516-5352-4f48-bfac-236e43b2342d?shareType=nongift) to China’s Export-Import Bank (EXIM), borrowed to finance the construction of a large highway project, alarm bells were raised across Europe. The request presented the EU with a problem that members of the World Bank may soon find themselves grappling with—what to do about large loans for economically unviable projects already under construction as part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The European Commission ultimately [decided to reject](https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-montenegro-billion-dollar-china-unfinished-highway-loan/) Montenegro’s request, raising fundamental questions about the EU’s willingness to reckon with BRI’s expansion.

While China’s BRI is commonly associated with Central and East Asia, as explained in a new CFR-sponsored [Independent Task Force report](https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/), it has a growing footprint in Europe, with two-thirds of EU member states now signed on as formal partners. Prominent BRI investments have occurred in Greece, where the port of [Piraeus](https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/China-bolsters-Europe-foothold-with-Belt-and-Road-expansion) has been refurbished and expanded by firms associated with the Chinese state, [Portugal](https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29246/how-long-can-portugal-continue-to-play-both-sides-of-the-u-s-china-rivalry), which has had large Chinese investments in both the energy sector and in its port of Sines, and Hungary, which is home to a section of the troubled [Budapest-Belgrade railway](https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/china-and-the-budapest-belgrade-railway-saga/), one of BRI’s flagship European projects.

Outside of the EU proper, China has funded numerous projects in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. All together, these investments reflect China’s desire to tie itself to Europe through the expansion of railroads, airport hubs, and ports. Thanks to these investments, and European demand for medical supplies, in 2020, trade in goods between China and Europe was larger than trade in goods between Europe and the United States for the first time. Many products moved along expanded and [heavily subsidized](https://www.railfreight.com/railfreight/2021/01/11/is-the-elimination-of-chinese-subsidies-a-good-idea/#:~:text=Over%20the%20past%20three%20years,subsidies%20are%20eliminated%20in%202022.) rail lines connecting China and Europe, with more than [12,400 freight trains](https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-battle-with-u-s-for-global-sway-china-showers-money-on-europes-neglected-areas-11618310350) traveling between the two last year.

Strong economic ties between China and Europe have contributed to European leaders’ [reluctance](https://www.politico.eu/article/merkel-sides-with-xi-on-avoiding-cold-war-blocs/) to embrace Washington’s more hawkish posture towards China. The EU’s decision to complete negotiations with China on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) earlier this year and the decision by several European countries to join the China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015 are some of the starkest examples of Europe’s willingness, at times, to forge stronger ties with China despite U.S. concerns.

In 2019, Italy became the first (and currently only) Group of Seven member to join BRI. Italy’s decision, made over the objections of European and U.S. leaders, pushed the EU to [outline](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf) a new strategic approach to Beijing, which branded China as “an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.” It also accelerated the adoption of an EU-wide set of [regulations for screening foreign direct investment](https://www.bakermckenzie.com/en/insight/publications/2020/10/eu-foreign-investment-mechanism) and highlighted how the decline in European infrastructure spending after the Great Recession helped open the door to Chinese investment.

The precise policy implications of Europe’s new approach to China, however, are still the subject of debate. Some members of the European Parliament, for instance, are threatening to sink the CAI, arguing it fails to reflect Europe’s commitment to the transatlantic alliance or human rights, while the European Commission continues to press for its approval.

BRI’s push into Europe has made it harder for the EU to craft a united approach to China or to keep some aspiring Eastern European entrants to the bloc on board.European BRI beneficiaries like [Hungary](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/22/eleven-countries-signed-a-letter-slamming-china-for-torturing-lawyers-the-u-s-did-not/) and [Greece](https://www.wsj.com/articles/greece-vetoes-eu-condemnation-of-china-human-rights-record-1497858040) have pushed back on EU attempts to criticize China as a bloc. Austria, Hungary, and initially Greece resisted efforts to ban [Chinese 5G provider Huawei](https://www.cfr.org/blog/china-huawei-5g). In Serbia, a candidate for EU membership since 2012, China has been [funding projects](https://chinadialogue.net/en/climate/serbia-forges-ahead-with-china-backed-coal-power-plant/) that reportedly violate EU environmental regulations.

In addition to undermining European unity, BRI may also work to cleave the transatlantic alliance. Addressing China’s unfair trade practices and countering China’s growing influence abroad will require willing partners on both side of the Atlantic. A European reliance on Chinese funds for infrastructure development, and tighter economic links between China and Europe, will make aligning American and European interests more difficult.

To head off these dilemmas, Europe will need to provide clear alternatives to Chinese infrastructure spending. Reforming the EU’s budget rules to permit member states to spend more on infrastructure without running afoul of the [EU’s fiscal policy pact](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/stability-and-growth-pact/history-stability-and-growth-pact_en) requirements is one place to start. Roughly [80 percent](https://www.eib.org/attachments/efs/economic_investment_report_2018_key_findings_en.pdf) of the decline in infrastructure investment after 2008 reflected reduced public spending by EU member states, with the European Investment Bank (EIB) recently warning that government investment is approaching [a twenty-five-year low](https://www.eib.org/attachments/efs/economic_investment_report_2020_2021_key_findings_en.pdf). The EU already has suspended and is now considering renegotiating its budget rules to give greater leeway for deficit spending due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As EU Economics Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni has [suggested](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-fiscal-rules/eu-eyes-special-role-for-investment-in-budget-rules-review-idUSKBN2AQ29A), similar reforms should be made to facilitate greater government investment. Efforts should also be made to bolster existing pan-European investment vehicles, like the EIB, so that they better meet the infrastructure needs of European states.

Increasing transatlantic cooperation now could also help mitigate the long-term risks of BRI, and not simply in Europe. Such joint efforts could include steps to:

* strengthen the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to provide developing countries, including those in Eastern Europe, with alternatives to BRI financing;
* increase participation in international standards setting organizations, to ensure that product and services standards are not written solely for the benefit of Chinese technology;
* promote the global use of environmentally friendly and transparent financing practices;
* enhance collaboration among development finance agencies on both sides of the Atlantic to support the development and promotion of critical technology;
* better understand, through strategic mapping, where Chinese control of ports or undersea cables could threaten the ability of U.S., European, or NATO forces to access critical infrastructure;
* combat global corruption, particularly in relation to government procurement;
* launch technical training initiatives to increase developing countries’ ability to evaluate debt and environmental sustainability of infrastructure projects;
* bolster and safeguard the rules-based trading order, including through the U.S.-EU-Japan tri­lateral project, with an eye to creating new disciplines on subsidies and forced technology transfer and reviving efforts to reform the WTO.

While the United States and Europe are unlikely to agree on every issue, there is increased recognition on both sides of the Atlantic that, when it comes to China, collaborating more often and more effectively is essential. The longer Europe waits to rise to this challenge, however, the more hardwired the connections between China and Europe will become, and the more difficult it will be to coordinate a joint U.S.-EU response to the risks posed by the Belt and Road.

3. **The Heritage Foundation**

**Protecting Taiwan Is Vital To Blocking Chinese Aggression In The Pacific
Apr 27th, 2021**

https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/protecting-taiwan-vital-blocking-chinese-aggression-the-pacific

How should the U.S. respond in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan?

The answer to this question is often presumed to be the same as if an adversary were to invade NATO, Japan or South Korea, in which case the United States would respond promptly and forcefully to repel the adversary.

But the reality is that Taiwan is not quite the same as any of these other partners.

To begin with, the United States does not diplomatically “recognize” Taiwan, or more specifically, the Republic of China (ROC). In 1979, the United States switched recognition from the ROC to recognizing the People’s Republic of China. (Beijing only allows you to have formal diplomatic relations with one or the other.)

**>>>**[**Why U.S.-Taiwan Relations Are Partnership for Freedom**](https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/why-us-taiwan-relations-are-partnership-freedom)

Hedging its bets, however, and not wanting to simply walk away from the people of Taiwan (the way the U.S. had in South Vietnam several years earlier), Congress enacted the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), to govern U.S. relations with the island.

The TRA is a law, not quite the same as a binding treaty, such as those that undergird the NATO alliance or the commitments to Japan and South Korea. While the authors tried to approximate best they could the U.S.-ROC security treaty the TRA replaced, the TRA does not contain the treaty’s explicit commitment to “act to meet the common danger.”

This does not mean that the United States can walk away from its multi-decade commitment to Taiwan without cost, however. The TRA did establish long-standing policy that “any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means… (would be) a grave concern to the U.S.,” and that the president and Congress would determine appropriate action in response to such danger.

This is close enough to a security commitment that a failure to respond to an act of naked aggression by the PRC against Taiwan would raise real questions about American commitments to those treaty allies. Coming in within 10 years of U.S. failure to enforce the Syrian red line after Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons (when then Secretary of State John Kerry famously declared that Assad staying in power was a “non-starter”); and the inconclusive conclusion to the two-decade war in Afghanistan, American allies would rightfully wonder what the value of an American security commitment actually is.

More to the point, a Chinese victory over Taiwan would drastically alter the strategic environment in the western Pacific. The so-called “first island chain,” stretching from Japan through Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines, to the Straits of Malacca can serve as a shield *for both sides*. In Western hands, it limits China’s ability to break out into the central Pacific where it can threaten Japan and South Korea’s sea lines of communications, and imposes attrition on Chinese forces trying to roll back the U.S. to Guam or Hawaii. The recent costs imposed by simply one ship blocking the Suez Canal gives a glimpse of the costs imposed on the Japanese and South Korean economies should China conquer Taiwan.

In Chinese hands, the first island chain protects China’s economic center of gravity, which has moved to the coast over the past four decades. Chinese bombers on Taiwan could more easily reach Guam, without having to detour around the island; conversely, American bombers seeking to hit Chinese targets would now be detected hundreds of miles and vital minutes earlier. Similarly, American submarines hoping to snipe at Chinese naval forces and its merchant marine would now have to transit well-known gaps in the island chain.

**>>>**[**Building a Robust U.S.-Taiwan Economic Dialogue**](https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/building-robust-us-taiwan-economic-dialogue)
https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/building-robust-us-taiwan-economic-dialogue

A U.S.-Taiwan free trade agreement is long overdue and should be a priority for 2021. And the deal should be about making trade freer and less about managing trade flows. But the need for greater U.S.-Taiwan economic cooperation goes beyond just negotiating a free trade agreement.

A regular, and therefore reliable, U.S.-Taiwan economic dialogue is important. A one-off meeting will signal to the world that the U.S. isn’t as invested in building its partnerships, especially Taiwan, as it claims to be. The U.S.-Taiwan economic dialogue should also be robust, and there are lessons to be shared between Washington and Taipei.

Looking for ways to foster innovation for our growing digital economies will be one major issue. U.S. and Taiwan officials actually began discussing [digital issues](https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/neglected-partner-asia-the-us-should-strengthen-economic-cooperation-taiwan) as early as 2018. That’s a good thing, especially considering how much more important the digital economy has become to our daily lives just since the pandemic took hold.

The pandemic has also shown Taiwan to be a reliable partner in sharing health information and services. Other emerging issues, such as energy and the technology supply chain, are areas for cooperation as well. Major U.S. and Taiwan technology companies are already investing heavily in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship.

The first meeting of the U.S.-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership should be the first step in building a robust U.S.-Taiwan relationship. Hopefully, the best is yet to come.

**4. CSIS**

**The WTO Can Help Shine a Spotlight on Forced-Labor Practices in Xinjiang’s Cotton Industry
April 27, 2021**

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/wto-can-help-shine-spotlight-forced-labor-practices-xinjiangs-cotton-industry>
The World Trade Organization (WTO) on May 28 will convene one of its biannual “dedicated discussions” to review trade-related developments on cotton. The purpose of these discussions, an outcome of the WTO’s [2013 Bali Ministerial Conference](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc9_e/desci41_e.htm), is to ensure full transparency on all trade-related matters affecting cotton in the areas of market access, domestic support, and export competition. The value of the discussions largely depends upon the information supplied by WTO members through their [required notifications](https://www.csis.org/analysis/transparency-wto-why-does-transparency-matter-and-are-members-meeting-their-obligations) of trade subsidies and measures as well as other data members may decide to share.

For next month’s dedicated discussion to have credibility, it must examine the trade impact of the use of forced labor to pick cotton in China’s Xinjiang province. In light of what we have learned about forced-labor practices in Xinjiang, it is inconceivable that the WTO would convene a meeting on cotton and trade and not include these practices as a topic worthy of review. Simply put, ignoring what is happening in Xinjiang would be tantamount to the WTO holding a meeting on global public health and trade without mentioning the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recent [reports](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/nz0g306v8c/china-tainted-cotton) have documented that hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang have been forced to pick cotton by hand through a state-mandated labor transfer and “poverty alleviation” scheme, part of China’s [Strike Hard Campaign](https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs) against alleged extremism among the province’s Muslim population. Some of those participating in these labor transfers have spent time in Xinjiang’s extensive [network](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-01/satellite-images-expose-chinas-network-of-re-education-camps/10432924?nw=0) of internment camps.

Picking cotton by hand is exhausting and debilitating work, with the wages paid typically very low. As [explained](https://newlinesinstitute.org/china/coercive-labor-in-xinjiang-labor-transfer-and-the-mobilization-of-ethnic-minorities-to-pick-cotton/) by researcher Adrian Zenz, the labor transfers in Xinjiang “involve coercive mobilization through local work teams, transfers of pickers in tightly supervised groups, and intrusive on-site surveillance by government officials and (in at least some cases) police officers.” The labor situation in Xinjiang is so concerning that the U.S. government has effectively [banned](https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-issues-region-wide-withhold-release-order-products-made-slave) the importation into the United States of all cotton products originating from the province.

Xinjiang plays an important role in global cotton production. Cotton sourced from Xinjiang accounts for approximately [85 percent](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56535) of China’s overall production and [more than 20 percent](https://www.csis.org/analysis/addressing-forced-labor-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-toward-shared-agenda) of the global share. Xinjiang cotton is used throughout Asia as part of the [garment production](https://newlinesinstitute.org/china/coercive-labor-in-xinjiang-labor-transfer-and-the-mobilization-of-ethnic-minorities-to-pick-cotton/) process.

The use of forced labor in the province has likely depressed the global price of cotton, adversely impacted other cotton-exporting nations (particularly those in the developing world) and improperly distorted global trade flows. Trade attorney Terence Stewart [suggests](https://currentthoughtsontrade.com/2021/01/25/child-labor-and-forced-labor-in-cotton-production-is-there-a-current-wto-mandate-to-identify-and-quantify-the-distortive-effects/) that forced- labor practices in Xinjiang may in fact constitute actionable subsidies under the WTO’s [Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Duties](https://www.trade.gov/trade-guide-wto-subsidies). Beijing has also encouraged [boycotts](https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/25/business/hm-nike-xinjiang-cotton-boycott-intl-hnk/index.html) of foreign retailers operating within China that have sought to distance themselves from products made with cotton harvested in Xinjiang.

The United States should bring the issue of forced labor in Xinjiang directly to the WTO by placing it on the agenda of the upcoming dedicated discussion on cotton and trade. Whatever information the U.S. government has developed about forced labor in the cotton fields of Xinjiang and its impact on trade should be shared with other WTO members. Doing so would be consistent with President Biden’s [trade agenda](https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/reports/2021/2021%20Trade%20Agenda/Online%20PDF%202021%20Trade%20Policy%20Agenda%20and%202020%20Annual%20Report.pdf), which makes combating forced labor a priority. It is also consistent with the views of U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai, who [said](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biden-trade-uighurs/forced-labor-crudest-example-of-problems-in-global-trade-ustr-nominee-tai-idUSKBN2AP2HQ) during her confirmation hearing that forced labor is “the crudest example of the race to the bottom in global trade.”

Unfortunately, cotton is not the only industry in Xinjiang suspected of utilizing forced labor. The U.S. government has also banned the importation of tomato products from Xinjiang because of similar concerns. With Xinjiang now the global center for the production of silicon-based solar modules, there is also [concern](https://www.csis.org/analysis/dark-spot-solar-energy-industry-forced-labor-xinjiang) that solar companies with factories operating in Xinjiang may be resorting to forced labor. While the labor practices deployed in these industries and others in Xinjiang merit close scrutiny, the WTO has established a specific forum to examine policies and practices affecting trade in cotton. The United States should seize this opportunity to shine a spotlight on what is happening in the cotton fields of Xinjiang.

Focusing on trade in a specific industry like cotton may seem trivial in light of the allegations of mass imprisonment, family separation, forced sterilization, and other forms of mistreatment that have led the U.S government as well as the parliaments of [Canada](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56163220), the [Netherlands](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-china-uighurs/dutch-parliament-chinas-treatment-of-uighurs-is-genocide-idUSKBN2AP2CI), and the [United Kingdom](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-parliament-declares-genocide-chinas-xinjiang-raises-pressure-johnson-2021-04-22/) to declare that a [genocide](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/15/xinjiang-uyghurs-intentional-genocide-china/) is taking place in Xinjiang. But China values its membership in the WTO, which has provided a platform for its remarkable economic growth over the past two decades. The Chinese government certainly does not want the WTO to became a forum in which it has to defend its use of forced labor in Xinjiang. That is even more reason why the United States and other WTO members should press the issue there.