The emerging contours of President Biden's foreign policy

SUMMARY

In mid-June 2021, United States (US) President Joe Biden is due to visit Europe for his first overseas trip since taking office in January. He will attend the Group of Seven (G7) summit from 11 to 13 June in Cornwall (United Kingdom), a NATO leaders' summit in Brussels on 14 June, followed by an EU-US summit on 15 June, and, on 16 June, a summit in Geneva (Switzerland) with Russian President Vladimir Putin. President Biden's arrival in Europe will mark almost five months in office, providing an opportunity to take stock of his foreign policy record thus far.

As the Democratic candidate in the November 2020 US presidential election, Biden promised that if elected he would pursue a 'foreign policy for the middle class'. He argued that strengthening the majority of citizens' financial security, investing in US industrial capacity, and countering destabilising inequities at home, would allow a more socially and economically cohesive US to compete with and confront rivals on the world stage. He also argued that his administration's most pressing domestic challenges – including overcoming the coronavirus pandemic, and adapting to and mitigating the impact of climate change on the US – would require international cooperation.

The Biden Administration's policy papers, positions and statements identify two broad priorities that guide its foreign policy: first, 'building back better' on a global scale, in pursuit of the same imperative at home. Second, working with allies to counter the threats to US interests posed by authoritarian rivals such as China and Russia, while working tactically with those same rivals where theirs and US interests overlap. Biden's early foreign policy moves have fulfilled promises to reverse Trump Administration policies in key areas, such as by re-entering the Paris Agreement, re-affirming the importance of the transatlantic partnership and other traditional alliances, and engaging diplomatically with rivals. However, elements of the previous administration's policies remain, in particular some of its trade policy priorities.
Introduction

The United States (US) has the world’s largest security, geopolitical and economic footprint, which means its foreign policy settings have consequences for every other government on earth. Almost uniquely, US foreign policy is shaped jointly by the President, who acts as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and by Congress, whose budgetary and legislative powers give it much scope to steer and constrain the executive’s foreign policy actions. As a result, observers of US foreign policy should track both White House decisions and legislative developments in Congress.

This briefing focuses exclusively on the former, and does not cover relevant legislation emerging in Congress. It takes an expansive view of US foreign policy, in line with the Biden Administration’s own approach, to include both the traditional security and diplomatic aspects of foreign policy as well as international trade and tax policies.

Interim national security guidance

On 3 March 2021, the Biden Administration released its interim national security strategy (INSSG), intended to advise federal agencies and departments in anticipation of a fully updated national security strategy (NSS) expected later in 2021 or in 2022. The US executive has since 1986 been obliged by statute to submit an annual NSS report to Congress, but, since 2001, the NSS has only actually been updated formally once in each four-year presidential term (in 2002, 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2017). The INSSG expands on remarks Biden made to the Munich Security Conference in February 2021, particularly his call to leverage international partnerships and alliances to address shared security challenges – expansively understood to comprise climate change and democratic progress, for example, alongside traditional military threats.

The INSSG identifies three key priorities:

- Protect US citizens’ security by countering the threat from great powers, regional adversaries, violent extremists, and transnational threats including climate change, infectious disease, cyberattacks and disinformation.
- Expand economic opportunity by redefining US economic interests in terms of workers’ living standards.
- Project and defend US values by strengthening democracy at home, by uniting the world’s democracies against threats to free societies.

In pursuit of these priorities, the INSSG further identifies four immediate tasks:

- Defend and nurture US strength at home, in terms of people, the economy, national defence and US democracy.
- Promote a ‘favourable distribution of power’ to deter and prevent adversaries from threatening the US and its allies, inhibiting access to the global commons or dominating key regions.
- Lead and sustain a stable and open international system based on international partnerships, multilateral institutions and rules.
- Invest in the US national security workforce, institutions and partnerships, pursue greater diversity in that workforce and modernise decision-making processes.

The INSSG integrates part of Biden’s domestic policy agenda, highlighting the domestic foundations for US strength abroad (for example, the resilience of US democratic institutions; a financially secure workforce), and, conversely, the external conditions for domestic revival. The focus on the domestic and external economic dimension of US national security is not itself new: President Trump’s 2017 NSS also identified economic competition with such rivals as China as a strategic security priority for the US. However, the INSSG’s focus on shoring up US democratic institutions as part of global efforts to protect other democracies – and vice versa – is new. Previous US administrations, such as that of
George W. Bush, have spoken from a position of perceived domestic democratic resilience, adopting a more offensive posture that aims to expand rather than merely defend the democratic world.

One conceivable weakness of the INSSG is that its expansive conception of national security may be too broad, combining aspects as diverse as military readiness abroad and racial justice in the US. This may make it difficult for the officials the INSSG is designed to guide to set priorities. On the other hand, the INSSG is meant to be provisional, and has been accompanied by more detailed (classified) guidance, for example, on the use of military force and the conduct of national security operations. In addition, the blurring of domestic and foreign policy priorities could be considered deliberate, and may be reflected in some of the unconventional appointments made to the new administration.

White House defence and diplomacy budget proposal for the 2022 fiscal year

On 9 April 2021, the White House Office of Management and Budget published a letter to Congress outlining the President’s proposed headline budget figures for the 2022 US fiscal year (FY) running from 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022. This was followed by a fully detailed proposal published on 28 May. Ultimately, Congress must pass the budgetary and appropriation bills that fund federal government discretionary spending, including the staffing and infrastructure of the US Department of Defense, the Department of State and other foreign policy agencies; but the President’s proposal expresses his priorities.

State, foreign aid and other international programmes

According to the Biden Administration’s own estimates, the President’s discretionary request for the Department of State, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and other international programmes amounts to US$63.5 billion, or US$6.8 billion more (+12%) than the amount enacted by Congress for FY2021. The White House writes in its letter to Congress that ‘after four years of neglect’, these resources would increase spending on climate initiatives, global health security, economic and security assistance to Central America, and the diplomatic and development workforce, and meet US international obligations. This section of the budget request would fund:

- prevention, detection and response to future biological threats and pandemics;
- external aspects of President Biden’s climate agenda, including US$2.5 billion for international climate programmes, and a further US$1.2 billion for climate adaptation and emissions mitigation in developing countries;
- support for governance reforms, and anti-corruption, poverty-reduction and economic development measures in Central America;
- US contributions to UN peacekeeping missions;
- US contributions to multilateral human rights protection efforts;
- US refugee and humanitarian assistance;
- external democratisation efforts and measures to counter authoritarianism;
- support for allies and for peace and reconciliation efforts in the Middle East.

According to a membership survey by the US Global Leadership Coalition, a non-governmental umbrella organisation for US corporate and non-profit foreign policy stakeholders, at least US$14 billion (+25 per cent) in additional international affairs (non-defence) spending would be needed to fully fund the pursuit of US economic, health, and national security interests and mitigate the global health and humanitarian impacts of the pandemic. In October 2020, the Center for American Progress, a think-tank associated with the Democratic Party, recommended a series of reforms for a post-Trump State Department, including the publication of a ‘national diplomacy strategy’ to complement the Pentagon’s national defence strategy and the White House’s national security strategy. It is not yet clear whether the Biden Administration plans to act on these.
Defence spending programmes

President Biden’s request for defence spending programmes amounts to US$753 billion, or $12.3 billion more (+1.7 per cent) than enacted for FY2021. This total includes US$715 billion for the US Department of Defense (DOD), with the rest allocated to defence-related functions in other agencies, such as the Department of Energy (which shares responsibility for US nuclear weapons programmes). Notably, the proposal would discontinue the separate funding category of ‘overseas contingency operations’ (OCO), a budgetary item that first appeared in FY2012 as a way of circumventing budgetary ceilings imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act and lifted in 2021. The White House highlights the following priorities for the DOD budget:

- Deter China – identified as the DOD’s 'top challenge' – as well as Russia, by leveraging a 'Pacific deterrence initiative' and working with Asia-Pacific and NATO allies.
- Support defence-sector research and development.
- Invest in US naval shipbuilding.
- Modernise the US nuclear deterrent.
- Invest in long-range strike capabilities.
- Better train and equip US forces.
- Improve military infrastructure and mission energy efficiency and resilience to climate change-induced extreme weather.
- Counter emerging biological threats.
- Provide financial assistance for military families.
- Fund the transition away from obsolete programmes, platforms and systems.

The defence spending proposal restores some of the priorities of the Obama Administration, such as energy efficiency and climate resilience, while placing more emphasis on others that have become more salient, such as deterring China and countering emerging biological threats. The proposal has been criticised by some Republican members of Congress, who argue it does not go...
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far enough to counter China, as well as by some Democrats, who feel it fails to break with a historically unfavourable ratio between diplomatic and foreign aid spending and defence spending.

2021 Trade policy agenda and international economic policy

A new US trade agenda

On 1 March, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) released its annual report to Congress on trade policy in 2020 and the trade policy agenda for 2021. The agenda identifies nine trade policy priorities for the Biden Administration:

- tackling the pandemic and restoring the economy;
- putting workers at the centre of US trade policy;
- putting the world on a sustainable environment and climate path;
- advancing racial equity and supporting under-served communities in the US;
- addressing China’s ‘coercive and unfair’ economic trade practices through a comprehensive strategy;
- partnering with friends and allies;
- defending the interests of US farmers, ranchers, food manufacturers and fishermen;
- promoting equitable economic growth around the world;
- making (international trade) rules count.

Three of these priorities mark a significant departure from the trade policy of the Trump Administration: sustainability and climate; international partnerships; and equitable global economic growth. They also integrate many of the same domestic policy priorities that appear in the INSSG. The remaining six trade policy priorities show elements of continuity with the Trump administration, either because they are based on a traditional bipartisan consensus, or because they reflect areas of overlap between President Biden’s and President Trump’s trade policy agendas – not least the increased emphasis on the benefits of international trade for US workers specifically, in contrast with broader macroeconomic indicators. One area of relative bipartisan consistency is the approach to reforming the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization (WTO): a USTR report on the topic published on 11 February 2021 echoed criticisms by ‘successive Administrations’ over the previous 20 years that the Body had failed to function in line with WTO Members’ intent.

On 24 February 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order No 14017 for a review by federal agencies of global supply chains in certain US industries (including semiconductors, batteries, strategic minerals, and pharmaceuticals) and sectors (such as defence, public health, information and communication technology, energy, transportation, and agriculture). The order is considered an information-gathering exercise in advance of reports to the National Security Advisor and the National Economic Council, before a final report recommending possible reforms is submitted to the President – according to one estimate in early 2022.

On 15 April 2021, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai gave a speech in which she criticised what she identified as a traditional aversion among US trade policy-makers to using trade policy to pursue climate-related and environmental objectives. She also pledged strong enforcement of environmental provisions in current and future agreements, such as those in the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which she helped negotiate as a Democratic Congressional trade adviser in the 116th US Congress. Some observers consider the USMCA to be a model for future US trade policy, in that it ‘rebalanced’ its predecessor the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by weakening the role of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) and strengthening labour, environmental and other commitments.

Proposed new international agreement on corporate tax in the OECD

Soon after being confirmed as US Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen took steps to advance multilateral negotiations within the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and
Development (OECD) on addressing tax base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS), including through global digital taxation and minimum corporate taxation rules. The negotiations had hitherto been impeded by weak political support from the US. On 7 April 2021, the US Treasury then published the Made in America tax plan (MATP) report, part of its American jobs plan (AJP) to invest in US infrastructure. The MATP is designed to provide some of the funding for the AJP by raising more corporate tax from major US multinationals in coordination with other tax jurisdictions. The MATP would, inter alia:

- increase the US corporate tax rate from 21 % to 28 %;
- discourage US companies from offshoring by raising the global minimum tax rate for multinational corporations from 10.5 % to 21 %;
- make it harder for US companies to take shelter in lower-tax jurisdictions by engaging in 'tax inversions' (merging with foreign companies in those jurisdictions), and
- eliminate tax preferences for fossil fuels.

On 8 April, it was reported that the US was offering to allow other countries to tax US companies based on sales in their jurisdictions in return for support for the other elements of the plan, in particular the increase in the global minimum tax rate. On 24 May, it was reported that the US had offered to lower its proposed global minimum tax rate from 21 to 15 %. In addition to helping to fund President Biden’s domestic infrastructure investment programme, the US Treasury writes that the MATP is guided by the objectives of reforming the national and international tax system in favour of labour, ending a global tax ‘race to the bottom’, and building a resilient economy better able to compete with other countries. Some observers agree that international tax reform could provide a necessary source of revenue to offset in part the cost of the pandemic and climate action. Others contend that a higher global minimum tax rate may be ‘impossible’ to enforce, but could partly meet public demands for multinational corporations to pay more tax.

Selected foreign policy issues

Relations with the EU

President Biden has taken a much more cooperative approach to the EU than did Trump, who expressed support for Eurosceptic movements and claimed that the EU was determined to ‘take advantage’ of the US. In line with Biden’s declared preference for working with international partners on foreign policy challenges, his administration has been quick to engage the EU on security, trade, climate and other issues. Since Biden took office on 20 January 2021, early positive moves in these areas have included: more generous US funding for the international COVAX Facility; US re-entry to the Paris Agreement and more ambitious EU and US decarbonisation targets; the re-launch of the EU-US ‘dialogue on China’; and coordinated EU-US sanctions against Chinese officials in response to reported human rights abuses in Xinjiang, China.

However, not all bilateral transatlantic disputes have been resolved. On 5 May 2021, USTR Katherine Tai announced the US government's support for a proposal presented by South Africa and India at the WTO to waive intellectual property protections for pandemic-related products, including Covid-19 vaccines (see below), apparently without consulting the EU. The US has declared a more ambitious decarbonisation target for 2030, but counselled caution on the EU’s planned carbon border adjustment mechanism. A comprehensive agreement on the Boeing-Airbus WTO subsidies dispute is pending while tariffs are temporarily suspended, and the two sides have agreed on de-escalation measures vis-à-vis President Trump’s ‘Section 232’ tariffs on EU steel and aluminium imports, but they and the EU’s retaliatory tariffs have yet to be removed.

On 10 May 2021, EU ministers meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council took stock of the initial period of engagement with the new US administration and to set priorities for the following months. According to the Council read-out and a statement by High Representative Josep Borrell, the discussion recognised a ‘renewed partnership’ based on ‘more engagement, more coordination and
cooperation’. However, an unpublished Commission policy paper reportedly noted the persistence of some irritants, including ‘the extraterritorial effects of US sanctions impacting EU companies and interests; the tariffs placed on the EU’s steel and aluminium on national security grounds; divergences in the technology area; the strong US domestic focus on a Buy America policy’. On 26 May, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with European External Action Service Secretary-General Stefano Sannino in Brussels in ‘the first high-level meeting of the EU-US dialogue on China’. On 28 May, in anticipation of the G7 meeting in Cornwall and the US-EU meetings in Brussels in June, it was reportedly that the US was hoping to be able to announce a deal with the G7 and its EU partners on international and digital tax (see above) and on global trade policy reform.

International pandemic assistance

On his first day in office on 20 January 2021, Biden reversed the Trump Administration’s decision to withdraw the US from the World Health Organization (WHO). In February, he announced a US$4 billion donation to the WHO-led COVAX programme to distribute vaccines to low and middle-income countries, with US$2 billion released immediately and the remainder to be disbursed in 2021 and 2022. This made the US the world’s largest financial donor to COVAX, which by 31 May had distributed more than 77 million vaccine doses (primarily AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech) to 127 countries. In a 24 March speech in Brussels, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called for coordination across ‘a wide array of partners’ to address transnational threats, including the pandemic.

The US is one of the world’s major manufacturers of the Covid-19 vaccine, in particular of the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, and by 1 June 2021 had administered more than 295 million doses inside its own borders. On 5 May 2021, the US declared its support for an initiative led by South Africa and India at the WTO to waive intellectual property (IP) protections for Covid-19 vaccines. However, European Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis contends that IP is ‘just one part of the story’, and some observers maintain that the use of the US Defense Production Act, first invoked by President Trump but kept in place by Biden, amounts to a de facto vaccine export ban by obliging US manufacturers to prioritise US-based contracts; the Biden Administration has rejected this claim. In March 2021, the administration agreed to share approximately 4 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which had not yet been approved for use in the US, with Mexico and Canada, and on 26 April, it agreed to share another 60 million AstraZeneca doses with other countries, including India, where Covid-19 cases and deaths were rising exponentially. On 30 April, Pfizer announced that it would begin exporting some of its US-made vaccines, a move the Biden Administration publicly supported. On 17 May, Biden announced that the US would be donating a further 20 million US-authorised vaccine doses to other countries.

Bid for global climate leadership

One cornerstone of President Biden’s domestic and foreign policy is the fight against climate change, which is seen as an opportunity for the US and the rest of the world to ‘build back better’, but also for the US to assert geopolitical leadership and pursue economic competitiveness in emerging industries. Upon entering office on 20 January 2021, Biden brought the US back into the Paris Agreement, and appointed former US Secretary of State John Kerry to the role of Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, responsible for the diplomatic aspects of the administration’s climate agenda. On 22 and 23 April 2021, President Biden convened 40 world leaders for a virtual leaders’ summit on climate, where he unveiled a new US target of cutting US greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 50 to 52% by 2030 compared with 2005 levels. He also encouraged the other participants to present new and more ambitious targets. This included the EU, which on 21 April had reached an agreement between Parliament and Council on a target of reducing EU GHG by at least 55% by 2030, compared with 1990 levels.
Migration and refugee policy

As candidate, Biden promised to reverse many of the restrictive immigration measures taken by the Trump Administration, such as the use of the defence budget to construct fencing (a ‘border wall’) at the southern border with Mexico, the policy of separating migrant parents from their children, and the travel and refugee ban on people from 13 predominantly Muslim and African countries (the ‘Muslim ban’), the last of which Biden did on his first day in office. Biden also promised to raise the US’s annual global refugee admissions cap to 125,000, up from the Trump Administration’s cap of 15,000 (the lowest since the modern US refugee regime was established by the 1980 Refugee Act). However, Biden initially kept the 15,000 limit in place, before announcing, on 3 May 2021, that he would raise it to 62,500 for the 2021 fiscal year.

Migration at the US’s southern border emerged as a major foreign policy issue in March 2021, when interceptions of unauthorised migrants reached the highest level since 2001. Experts attribute this spike to a combination of long- and short-term factors in the ‘Northern Triangle’ countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, including, on the one hand, stark inequality, poor governance and violence, and on the other, natural disasters and the resumption of pandemic-delayed plans. On 5 February 2021, Biden issued Executive Order No 14010 to establish a ‘comprehensive regional framework to address the causes of migration, to manage migration throughout North and Central America, and to provide safe and orderly processing of asylum seekers at the United States border’. In March 2021, US Vice-President Kamala Harris was put in charge of an administration-wide effort to address conditions in the Northern Triangle that act as ‘push’ factors for large-scale emigration.

China

President Biden’s initial approach to relations with China shows elements of both continuity with, and difference from, that of his predecessor. He has referred to China as the US’s ‘most serious competitor’, and a challenge to US ‘prosperity, security and democratic values’. Where President Trump preferred to confront China unilaterally, and put pressure on other countries to adopt US policies with little input, President Biden has stressed the importance of coordinating with partners and allies, for example, by convening a meeting on 12 March 2021 of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the ‘Quad’) between the US, Japan, Australia and India. On 9 February, two US aircraft carriers were deployed to the South China Sea, in waters contested between China and its south-east Asian neighbours.

On the trade front, many issues in Sino-US relations date back to the 2010s or even earlier, when China began to emerge as a serious economic competitor to the US and other major economies, and as a consequential part of the global economy: efforts to prevent currency appreciation; forced technology transfers from US firms in the Chinese market; intellectual property theft; and the role of the Chinese state in the economy, including state subsidies that incentivise over-production of steel. While it is true that the Biden Administration is less focused on the balance of trade with China or other partners as a standalone metric, so far it has chosen to keep trade tariffs imposed on China by the previous administration in place, while it carries out a thorough review of the trade relationship. The Biden Administration also insists that China should deliver on the ‘Phase I’ agreement concluded by President Trump.

The new US approach to geopolitical competition with China also shows signs of both continuity and departure. Given the importance of the climate agenda to Biden’s presidency, he has recognised the necessity to work with China as part of global efforts to cut emissions, which the Trump Administration did not prioritise. On the other hand, Biden appears to be building on Trump’s policy of enhanced unofficial engagement with Taiwan while stopping short of full diplomatic recognition, with the State Department having issued new guidelines on 9 April 2021 on US government interactions with Taiwan. However, in some respects the new guidelines do not go as far as those put in place by the Trump Administration. On 22 March, the US joined the EU, the UK and Canada in
announcing sanctions against Chinese government officials over alleged human rights abuses against the minority Uighur population, and on 12 May the US announced further sanctions on a Chinese official accused of persecuting other religious minorities in China, in conjunction with the release of an annual report on international religious freedom.

Russia

In notable contrast with President Trump, President Biden has labelled Russian President Vladimir Putin a ‘killer’ and indicated that he intends to confront Russia on a number of issues, including: its role in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan; the SolarWinds cyber-breach of US government agencies in late 2020; attempted interference in US elections; and assassinations of political opponents of the Putin government. At the same time, Biden has signalled that he plans to collaborate with Russia on areas of common interest, such as arms control (both bilaterally and with respect to third players, such as Iran) and climate change. On 26 January 2021, Biden held his first call with Putin, in which he reaffirmed US support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and expressed concern about the poisoning of Alexey Navalny, while also offering cooperation on arms control and promising ‘transparent and consistent’ communication. On 3 February 2021, the administration announced that it had agreed with Russia on a five-year extension of the START nuclear arms control treaty.

In April 2021, the US imposed new sanctions on the Russian government and certain individuals in retaliation for a range of foreign activities, from cyber-attacks and election interference to disruptive interventions around the world; it was reported that Biden warned President Putin personally two days in advance of the sanctions announcement, in an effort to minimise the disruption to overall US-Russian relations. Concerning the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline under construction in Russia and Germany, on 18 March Secretary of State Blinken reiterated the position that Biden himself had stated as Vice-President in August 2016, that the project was a ‘bad deal for Europe’. At the same time, the administration has come under pressure from Congress to do more to implement sanctions on Nord Stream 2 as required by legislation passed in 2019 and 2020, and on 19 May 2021 the administration waived Congressionally mandated sanctions against Germany, amid speculation that it is reluctant to damage US-German and transatlantic relations. In April it was reported that Biden was considering appointing a US special envoy to negotiate the project’s termination.

In a second call on 13 April 2021, Biden expressed concern to Putin about Russia’s build-up of military forces near the Ukrainian border (subsequently withdrawn by Russia) and called on Russia to de-escalate tensions with Ukraine. Biden also proposed a summit between the two leaders ‘in the coming months’ to discuss the ‘full range of issues facing the United States and Russia’, which is now confirmed for 16 June 2021.

Middle East and Afghanistan

As presidential candidate, Biden promised to ‘end forever wars’ in the Middle East and Afghanistan, by reducing the number of US troops deployed there, and concentrating those that remain on fighting Al-Qaeda and ISIS. On 14 April 2021, the Biden Administration announced the withdrawal of all US troops in Afghanistan by 11 September of the same year, a move that has been praised by some experts and criticised by others. As presidential candidate, Biden also called for a return to the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA) placing limits on Iran’s nuclear capacity, from which President Trump withdrew in May 2018. As of the beginning of June 2021, the US and Iran were conducting indirect talks on restoring the deal with the support of the remaining treaty parties – Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany – and the sponsorship of the EU, in its capacity as chair of the joint commission responsible for overseeing the JCPOA’s implementation.

On 25 February 2021, in the Biden Administration’s first military intervention in the Syrian conflict, the US carried out an air strike on what it said were Iran-backed militias in Syria that had attacked civilian contractors earlier that month. One expert welcomed the strike as a ‘measured response’, but others lament the absence thus far of a comprehensive new US Syria strategy. On 26 February 2021, the Biden Administration chose to make public a report concluding that Saudi Arabia’s Crown
Prince approved the 2018 murder of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, Turkey. It has also *indicated* that it will be less accommodating of the US ally than was President Trump. On 7 April, the administration *announced* the restoration of economic, development, and humanitarian aid to the West Bank and Gaza, reversing President Trump's decision to end it. On the other hand, the Biden Administration so far has *chosen* not to reverse Trump's removal of the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, nor its recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights. In response to the outbreak of hostilities over the Gaza Strip in May 2021, Biden *encouraged* both parties to halt fighting, while resisting *pressure* from progressive Congressional Democrats to take stronger measures against Israel and *withholding* support for a UN Security Council statement it deemed overly critical of Israel. On 20 May, Israel and Hamas *announced* a ceasefire after 11 days of hostilities.

**MAIN REFERENCES**


Young S., *Summary of the President’s Discretionary Funding Request*, Office of Management and Budget, 9 April 2021.


**ENDNOTES**

1 These figures are expressed in current (nominal) dollars, which are not adjusted for inflation. For comparisons of requested and enacted 'State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs' budgets for fiscal years 2013 through 2021, see *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2021 Budget and Appropriations*, Congressional Research Service, 18 March 2021.

2 On 19 April 2021, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that the renewable energy sector was one domain of economic rivalry with China. See K. Manson and L. Hook, ‘*Blinken says US must lead green energy revolution to combat China*, Financial Times, 19 April 2021.

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