



BIDEN @ 100 DAYS:
A Climate Foreign-Policy Scorecard

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Climate change is the defining global challenge of the twenty-first century. It constitutes a direct threat to the safety and prosperity of Americans. U.S. President Joe Biden has committed to reorienting U.S. foreign policy to meet the climate challenge. It's hard to over-state the effort and investment this will require: truly reorienting U.S. foreign policy means not just turning the ship of state, but refitting it while at sea. President Biden's climate pledges cover a wide range of issues, from eliminating fossil fuel subsidies to protecting species threatened by climactic change.

This report provides an early assessment of the Biden administration's international climate diplomacy against these goals in the first 100 days, recognizing that others have focused on domestic policy,¹ and that climate change must be at the top of the U.S. foreign-policy agenda.² It builds on a previous report by the Brown University Climate Solutions Lab, issued on October 8, 2020 that identified and recommended ten executive climate actions, which are central to advancing U.S. foreign-policy objectives.³ True, many initiatives are still in development at only 100 days into Biden's administration. Still, if the world is to meet its climate goals, swift and decisive action must be taken, and the 100 day mark is an important opportunity to take stock of where U.S. policy has changed – and where it must change further.

Of the 9 interntionally-oriented climate pledges we evaluate, made by the Biden campaign during the 2020 presidential election, we find that the Biden team has already delivered effectively on 4 of them, made some progress on 2, and taken baby steps or made no real progress on 3. These will require further attention and resources in the coming months.

In brief, the Biden administration has succeeded in transforming the messaging around climate change and U.S. foreign policy, making clear it is a cross-cutting priority. The Biden administration has created new government positions like Special Envoy for Climate Change (John Kerry) and National Climate Advisor (Gina McCarthy). It has significantly increased the ambition of U.S. National Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement, pledging to reduce U.S. emissions by at least half below 2005 levels by 2030; launched a U.S.-India clean energy initiative that includes

¹ Siegel, Kassie and Su, Jean. "Legal Authority for Presidential Executive Action on Climate." Center for Biological Diversity (2019); Burger, Michael, and Daniel J. Metzger. "Climate Reregulation in a Biden Administration." Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, August 2020; Greider, Clara, and Jordan Gerow. "Climate Recommendations For a New Democratic President and a New Congress: A Compilation." Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, August 9, 2020.

² As advocated by: Bordoff, Jason. "It's Time to Put Climate Action at the Center of U.S. Foreign Policy." *Foreign Policy* (blog), July 27, 2020; Fuchs, Michael H. "A Foreign Policy for the Post-Pandemic World." *Foreign Affairs*, July 24, 2020; Rhodes, Ben. "The Democratic Renewal." *Foreign Affairs*, August 18, 2020; and Podesta, John, and Todd Stern. "A Foreign Policy for the Climate." *Foreign Affairs*, June 2020.

³ Shaia and Colgan 2020.

<https://watson.brown.edu/files/watson/imce/news/explore/2020/Final%20CSL%20Report.pdf>

both clean technology development and climate financing tracks;⁴ committed to triple climate finance to vulnerable countries;⁵ and directed agencies to seek ways to phase out fossil fuels from U.S. overseas public financing. Perhaps most strikingly, it has made climate change an organizing principle both of domestic policy, where it represents an important focus of major legislation including the proposed infrastructure bill, and foreign policy, where the administration has made clear that relationships with major countries and multi-lateral bodies like NATO will all be framed largely by climate goals.⁶

All of these moves have effectively created an institutional infrastructure to reduce U.S. emissions, and to persuade other countries to do the same. Unfortunately, even as the Administration and key partners around the world, including the European Union and Japan, raise their action and ambition, climate science paints an ever-bleaker picture. Recent research suggests that the immense West Antarctic Ice Sheet may be on a path toward collapse, which would essentially guarantee several meters of additional sea-level rise;⁷ and that circulation in the North Atlantic Ocean has slowed more than at any other time in the past 1,600 years – a key climate benchmark and one that could dramatically shift weather patterns.⁸ Put simply, the world is essentially out of time to formulate a conventional policy solution to the climate crisis. Addressing it will likely mean much more ambitious investment in technology to slash emissions and help the poorest adapt to increasingly severe climate effects.

As much as the Biden Administration has succeeded in shifting the focus of both domestic and foreign policy toward climate change, it is also clear that much more must be done to meet the scale of the climate crisis at home and abroad. The importance of not just setting but meeting targets for domestic emissions reductions as the foundation for U.S. global climate leadership cannot be overstated. The headline commitments that the U.S. announced on April 22, which are based on a 2030 timeframe, must be matched by detailed and verifiable interim targets in specific sectors like energy sector methane emissions and vehicle emissions. These sector-level targets are among the most difficult to meet – which is why U.S. leadership in setting them is so important. Setting detailed interim targets, and being transparent in how close the U.S. is to meeting them, is important to build

⁴ U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, “U.S. – India Joint Statement on Launching the ‘U.S.-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership,’” U.S. Department of State, April 22, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-india-joint-statement-on-launching-the-u-s-india-climate-and-clean-energy-agenda-2030-partnership/>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/U.S.-International-Climate-Finance-Plan-4.22.21-Updated-Spacing.pdf>

⁶ Birnbaum, Michael; Ryan, Missy. “Facing sweltering soldisers and flooded ports, NATO to focus on climate change.” *The Washington Post*. March 23, 2021.

⁷ Hogan, Kelly A., et al. “Revealing the former bed of Thwaites Glacier using sea-floor bathymetry: implications for warm-water routing and bed controls on ice flow and buttressing,” *The Cryosphere* 14, 2883-2908, 2020.

⁸ Caesar, L. et al., “Current Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation weakest in last millennium,” *Nature Geoscience* 14, 118-120, 2021.

trust as the U.S. attempts to prod other nations to increase the ambition of their own climate commitments.

Indeed, it is becoming increasingly apparent that at the Biden administration will need to do more to encourage, support, and cajole other nations to increase the ambition of their Nationally Determined Contributions. The administration should also consider working with allies to deploy sticks in the form of diplomatic pressure and even carbon border tax adjustments or other trade measures for major economies who refuse to adopt ambitious emissions reduction commitments. In addition, there is much that can be done to work with U.S. allies and like-minded nations to make progress in areas like reducing deforestation, aviation and shipping emissions.⁹

Another priority should be climate finance and sectoral emissions reduction initiatives. Already, numerous private sector and multi-stakeholder initiatives are reducing emissions, such as the UN's Race to Zero umbrella campaign or specific initiatives in areas like transport, energy, or forests.¹⁰ While many US companies, cities, states, and civil society groups are engaged in such work, as the Scorecard shows below, there is considerable scope to enhance U.S. participation in existing sectoral dialogues and to mobilize far greater capital resources to support both more advanced clean technology development and deployment and adaptation assistance across the globe.¹¹

Finally, yet in some ways most importantly, the Biden administration must keep its eye on meeting the climate crisis, no matter what other crises emerge alongside it. The climate leadership summit hosted by President Biden on April 22 was a striking display of unity from world leaders including President Putin of Russia and Xi of China – even as growing fears of an armed confrontation over the disputed regions of eastern Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively, seized the minds of national security officials. But there is a real danger that the Biden Administration's focus on climate change could be shaken by a new crisis either at home or abroad.

The bottom line is that the Biden administration is delivering as much or more than many climate advocates could realistically have expected—and yet much more needs to be done to get our climate back on a sustainable path.

⁹ Shaia and Colgan 2020.

<https://watson.brown.edu/files/watson/imce/news/explore/2020/Final%20CSL%20Report.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://racetozero.unfccc.int/>

¹¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/all-in-climate-diplomacy-how-a-biden-harris-administration-can-leverage-city-state-business-and-community-climate-action/>

Early Specific Pledges	Comments / Evidence of Progress	
Cross-Cutting Domestic-Foreign Policy		
<p>1. Appoint climate advocates to key federal agencies</p> <p>2. Restore role of science in government</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>President Biden has appointed climate-knowledgeable personnel across the government, including National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy, Special Envoy John Kerry, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm.</p> <p>Secretary Blinken pledged to “weave in” climate change to high-level bilateral discussions, aiming to increase climate commitments.</p> <p>Special Envoy Kerry has stated that “every agency is now part of our climate team” and pledged to “make climate central to foreign policy planning and national security preparedness by creating platforms to coordinate climate action across all federal agencies.”</p> <p>Administration has attempted to codify climate change as an international security issue of the highest priority, as evidenced in the Special UN Security Council meeting on February 23, 2021.</p>
International Emissions Mitigation Policy		
<p>3. Rejoin the Paris Agreement & strengthen the US “Nationally Determined Contributions”</p> <p>4. Convene a “Climate World Summit” within the first 100 days in office</p> <p>5. Reinvigorate multilateral collaboration on clean-energy R&D</p> <p>6. Require public companies to disclose their climate risks & supply-chain emissions</p> <p>7. Instate a global moratorium on offshore drilling in the Arctic</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>◆</p> <p>○</p> <p>⊗</p>	<p>President Biden recommitted the United States to the Paris Agreement on his first day in office, and increased the US Nationally Determined Commitment on Earth Day, April 22, 2021.</p> <p>Key Leaders Summit on Climate outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan and Canada update 2030 goals • Korea announces end to coal finance abroad • US-India announce clean energy partnership <p>Also, Special Envoy Kerry pledged to ratify the Kigali Amendment; China made similar pledge in call to Germany and France.</p> <p>SEC is soliciting public comment on guidance to public companies to disclose climate risks and emissions; no requirements yet</p> <p>No clear progress on global ban for offshore drilling in Arctic (though Executive Order 13990 provides some protections for Alaska)</p>
International Finance		
<p>8. Eliminate fossil-fuel subsidies worldwide</p> <p>9. Prohibit federal financing for overseas fossil-fuel infrastructure</p>	<p>⊗</p> <p>◆</p>	<p>Little evidence of real progress in eliminating fossil-fuel subsidies worldwide (though Biden tax plan would reduce them in U.S.)</p> <p>International Climate Finance Plan issued on 22 April commits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to end carbon investments by 2030 and be net zero by 2040 • “Agencies will seek to end international investments in and support for carbonintensive fossil fuel-based energy projects” but no phase-out date specified. • US to double international climate finance over Obama Administration levels by 2024, expected to reach \$15b,

		including tripling funding for adaptation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USAID to issue new climate strategy Nov 2021 • Millennium Challenge Corporation to have 50% climate finance in 5 years
Domestic Policy (not evaluated)		
10. Hold polluters accountable and address environmental justice 11. Rollback Trump admin environmental-related reg reversals 12. Invest \$400 billion in clean-energy innovation by establishing ARPA-C, reducing airline emissions, etc. 13. Deploy clean-energy technology such as electric vehicles & 500,000 public EV charging stations by 2030 14. Create 10 million clean-energy jobs 15. Prohibit federal financing for US fossil-fuel infrastructure		[Not Evaluated]

Scorecard: Tracking Biden’s Progress on His Campaign Pledges on Climate Change

Legend: ✓ - Done / Good Progress; ◆ Making some progress; ○ Baby steps; ⊖ No progress to date