

President Biden's remarks on China during the March 26, 2021 Press Conference

Justin. Justin Sink, Bloomberg.

Q Thanks, Mr. President. I wanted to ask about your relationship with China now that you've been in office for a couple months. There's obviously the meeting in Alaska that was a little theatrical, and there's the continued human rights abuses.

So, today, I'm wondering: Are you more likely than you were when you came into office to maintain tariffs on China? Are you considering banning imports of forced-labor products? And would you consider cutting off U.S. investment or Chinese access to international payment systems?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, look, they're each specifically legitimate questions, but they only touch a smidgen of what the relationship with China really is about.

I've known Xi Jinping for a long time. Allegedly, by the time I left office as Vice President, I had spent more time with Xi Jinping than any world leader had, because President Obama and the Chinese President Hu decided we should get to know one another since it was inappropriate for the President of the United States to spend time with the vice president of another country. But it was obvious he was going to become the new leader of China.

So, I spent hours upon hours with him alone with an interpreter — my interpreter and his — going into great detail. He is very, very straightforward. Doesn't have a democratic — with a small "D" — bone in his body. But he's a smart, smart guy. He's one of the guys, like Putin, who thinks that autocracy is the wave of the future and democracy can't function in an ever — an ever-complex world.

So, when I was elected and he called to congratulate me, I think to the surprise of the China experts who were — his people were on call as well as mine, listening — we had a two-hour conversation. For two hours.

And we made several things clear to one another. I made it clear to him again what I've told him in person on several occasions: that we're not looking for confrontation, although we know there will be steep, steep competition.

Two, that we'll have strong competition but we'll insist that China play by the international rules: fair competition, fair practices, fair trade.

Thirdly, in order to compete effectively, I indicated that we're going to deal with China effectively, and we're going to need three things to do that. I tell him, our people. First, we're going to invest in American workers and American science. I said that all through the campaign and I say it again. And we're — and I'm setting up my administration to be able to do that, which is that, you know, back in the '60s, we used to invest a little over 2 percent of our entire GDP in pure research and investment in science. Today, it's 0.7 percent. I'm going to change that. We're going to change that.

The future lies in who can, in fact, own the future as it relates to technology, quantum computing, a whole range of things, including in medical fields. And so what I'm going to do is make sure we invest closer to 2 percent.

One of the reasons why I've set up the — the ~~PAB~~ [PCAST] — the President's board with scientists and the like, again — is we're going to invest in medical research — cancer, Alzheimer's, diabetes, the things — industries of the future — artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotech. And we're going to make real investments. China is out investing us by a longshot, because their plan is to own that future.

The third — the second thing we're going to do is we're going to reestablish our alliances. And I've been very clear with him, it's not anti-Chinese. And we've talked about it.

I want to make sure that, for example, later today, after this — as a matter of fact, shortly after this, which is fine; we've been going close to an hour. I'm happy to go longer. But one of the things that I'm going to be doing, I'm going to be speaking with the 27 heads of state in Europe and very shortly — I think within the next hour or so. I don't know the exact time.

And earlier this month — and apparently it got the Chinese's attention; that's not why I did it — I met with our allies and how we're going to hold China accountable in the region: Australia, India, Japan, and the United States — the so-called Quad. Because we have to have democracies working together.

Before too long, I'm going to have — I'm going to invite an alliance of democracies to come here to discuss the future. And so we're going to make it clear that in order to deal with these things, we are going to hold China accountable to follow the rules — to follow the rules — whether it relates to the South China Sea or the North China Sea, or their agreement made on Taiwan, or a whole range of other things.

And the third thing, and the thing that I admire about dealing with Xi is he understands — he makes no pretense about not understanding what I'm saying any more than I do him — I pointed out to him: No leader can be sustained in his position or her position unless they represent the values of the country. And I said as — “And, Mr. President, as I've told you before, Americans value the notion of freedom. America values human rights. We don't always live up to our expectations, but it's a values system. We are founded on that principle. And as long as you and your country continues to so blatantly violate human rights, we're going to continue, in an unrelenting way, to call to the attention of the world and make it clear — make it clear what's happening.”

And he understood that. I made it clear that no American President — at least one did — but no American President ever back down from speaking out of what's happening to the Uighurs, what's happening in Hong Kong, what's happening in-country.

That's who we are. The moment a President walks away from that, as the last one did, is the moment we begin to lose our legitimacy around the world. It's who we are.

So I see stiff competition with China. China has an overall goal, and I don't criticize them for the goal, but they have an overall goal to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest

country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world. That's not going to happen on my watch because the United States are going to continue to grow and expand.

Q All right. Just to follow up on the meeting of democracies: Is that where you expect, in a multilateral way, to make these decisions about sanctions? Or —

THE PRESIDENT: No, that's not where I make the decision; that's where I make sure we're all on the same page. All on the same page. Look, I predict to you, your children or grandchildren are going to be doing their doctoral thesis on the issue of who succeeded: autocracy or democracy? Because that is what is at stake, not just with China.

Look around the world. We're in the midst of a fourth industrial revolution of enormous consequence. Will there be middle class? How will people adjust to these significant changes in science and technology and the environment? How will they do that? And are democracies equipped — because all the people get to speak — to compete?

It is clear, absolutely clear — and most of the scholars I dealt with at Penn agree with me around the country — that this is a battle between the utility of democracies in the 21st century and autocracies.

If you notice, you don't have Russia talking about communism anymore. It's about an autocracy. Demand decisions made by a leader of a country — that's what's at stake here. We've got to prove democracy works.