

# GREAT DECISIONS

## *Spring 2022 Update*

Outer Space • Climate Change • Russia and the U.S. •  
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### Outer Space

The outer space rivalry between the United States and China appeared to abate recently as Chinese astronauts interacted with an audience at the Chinese embassy in Washington DC on April 9th. The rare break in hostility between the two nations signaled the possibility of a future in which more collaboration could be possible. In a prerecorded remark, Elon Musk stated that he looks forward to “humanity working together.” In addition, Chinese Ambassador Qin Gang remarked that exploration in space is a “huge project of mankind and it requires extensive international cooperation.”

In the United States, the Biden administration requested \$26 billion for the 2023 NASA budget. This is the largest request for funds ever made for NASA. The largest portion of this budget will go toward the Artemis program, which is expected to be the program that will prepare NASA for human exploration of Mars. The goal is for humans to walk on Mars by 2040. The budget will also allocate \$2.4 billion to fund climate and weather monitoring. NASA aims to launch an Earth Information Center that monitors greenhouse gases and other conditions on Earth in coordination with other governmental agencies.

On April 18th, Vice President Kamala Harris announced at the Vandenberg Space Force Base in California that the United States will not conduct anti-satellite missile testing, and she called on other nations to make the same commitment. This announcement was in part prompted

by Russia's destructive direct ASAT missile test in November 2021 which received much condemnation. The destruction of space objects generates debris that could damage satellites and pose a threat to astronauts.

### Recommended Readings

Jones, Andrew, “China gears up for new space station missions, record-breaking crew set to return home,” *Space News* (Apr 14, 2022)

<https://spacenews.com/china-gears-up-for-new-space-station-missions-record-breaking-crew-set-to-return-home/>

Strickland, Ashley, “Biden's \$26 billion proposal for NASA paves path for 1st human exploration on Mars,” *CNN* (Mar 28, 2022)

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/28/politics/nasa-2023-biden-budget-scn/index.html>

“Fact Sheet Vice President Harris Advances National Security Norms in Space,” *The White House* (Apr 18, 2022)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/18/fact-sheet-vice-president-harris-advances-national-security-norms-in-space/>

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## Climate Change

The Build Back Better Act which promised to advance several initiatives to combat climate change has not been able to pass the evenly split senate. This has been due to Sen. Joe Manchin's (D-WV) unwillingness to support the act as he considers parts of it to be a threat to his state's coal interests.

Since early February, the Biden administration has enacted new actions across several agencies to make the industrial sector more sustainable. Some of these include: the Department of Energy's launch of clean hydrogen initiatives, the creation of a "Buy Clean Task Force" which will utilize the federal government's purchasing power to support U.S. factories producing low-carbon materials, and the formulation of carbon-based trade policies to advantage U.S. producers of clean steel and aluminum. In addition, the Council on Environmental Quality issued new guidance on the use of carbon capture, utilization, and sequestration technologies that are used to reduce emissions from heavy industry. Also, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy launched a new Initiative for Interdisciplinary Industrial Decarbonization Research.

### Recommended Readings

"Fact sheet Biden Harris administration advances cleaner industrial sector to reduce emissions and reinvigorate American manufacturing," *The White House* (Feb 15, 2022)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/15/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-advances-cleaner-industrial-sector-to-reduce-emissions-and-reinvigorate-american-manufacturing/>

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## Russia and the U.S.

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This was comprised of missiles and airstrikes as well as a large ground invasion of the country from multiple directions. In response to the invasion, President Zelenskyy of Ukraine mobilized all men ages 18-60 to fight. Despite a fierce initial attack, Russia's military maneuvers have not brought victory as quickly as Putin anticipated. Russia's ill-prepared military has encountered strong resistance from Ukrainian soldiers and civilians alike, preventing Russia from capturing major cities includ-

ing the capital Kyiv.

While not explicitly, Putin has indicated that his ultimate goal is to topple Kyiv and bring all of Ukraine into the Russian orbit. This would serve his larger goal of challenging and diminishing NATO, an organization that he views as a threat to Russian prosperity.

Since the war began, Russian commanders have increasingly turned to attacks on civilians as the war has dragged on. The brutality of the fighting has caused five million Ukrainians to flee to surrounding countries. In response to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine, the United States has committed \$3.4 billion in security assistance, including heavy weapons and artillery. While not willing to move troops into the war at the risk of provoking Putin, Biden has increased troop levels in neighboring NATO countries to over 100,000.

Since the war began, diplomatic talks between Russia and Ukraine have failed to stop the conflict. On the international level, the United States and European Union have put into place some of the toughest economic sanctions against the Putin regime. And in the private sector, hundreds of western businesses and banks have suspended operations in Russia out of protest.

### Recommended Readings

Bilefsky, Dan, "The Roots of the Ukraine War: how the Crisis Developed," *The New York Times* (Apr 21, 2022)

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-europe.html>

Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in Ukraine," *CFR* (May 6, 2022)

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>

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*The UPDATES take into account  
events up to May 16, 2022.*

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## Drug Policy in Latin America

Some drug cartels are entering mainstream sectors of the Mexican economy, most notably the avocado and lime businesses. This move represents a departure from the usual trend of cartels working solely with illegal substances.

Mexico exports \$3.2 billion worth of avocados and \$500 million in limes annually, so there is a massive monetary incentive for the cartels to crack into these industries and run them. As a result of the rush to get into these lucrative industries, turf wars have broken out between rival cartels prompting the Mexican military to get involved to try and quell the violence.

The Mexican state of Michoacán has been the sight of the worst violence connected to these recent cartel moves. Local cartels have destroyed pre-established avocado forests in order to set up their own and muscle in on the business. If cartels are successful, their net profits from all of their operations combined could reach \$20 billion annually.

The president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, entered office on a “hugs not bullets” strategy to reduce violence in Mexico. This approach promised to challenge the cartels by increasing spending on social programs. It appears this tactic has not been working as there has been a fivefold increase in internally displaced Mexicans from 2020 to 2021. Some allies of the president hold faith that his strategy will eventually yield positive results.

In line with the growing violence, tensions have worsened between the cartels and the U.S. government. Recently, U.S. border patrol agents were shot at, and the U.S. consulate in Nuevo Laredo also came under attack by cartel members. President Obrador has requested the United States invest in regional economic development rather than sending military supplies.

## Recommended Readings

Abi-Habib, “In Mexico, One Cartel is Cleared, but Others Storm In,” *The New York Times* (May 4, 2022)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/americas/mexico-cartels-michoacan.html>

“Mexico dissolves U.S.-trained special unit fighting drug cartels after it was ‘infiltrated’ by criminals, president says,” *CBS News* (Apr 22, 2022)

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mexico-ends-us-trained-special-unit-fighting-drug-cartels/>

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## Biden’s Agenda

Since the beginning of 2022, Biden’s foreign policy has largely been focused on supporting Ukraine and holding Russia accountable for the invasion of this country. The United States is relying largely on the use of diplomacy to see these goals through. On March 15th, Biden signed the Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act with broad bipartisan support. This provided \$13.6 billion in military, humanitarian, and economic assistance to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia. Along with this package, Biden announced \$1 billion for the purpose of supplying Ukraine with weapons.

In addition to monetary support, the United States has banned the import of Russian energy products and identified a list of sectors to be targeted with sanctions. The United States is also open to accepting 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing the violence via a full array of legal pathways, including refugee programs.

On May 9th, Biden signed a lend-lease act, which waives time-consuming requirements to speed up arms supply to Ukraine. The Biden administration is trying to balance supporting Ukraine and not overtly provoking Russia. Some recent policy decisions risk upsetting that balance however. The decision to provide Ukraine with intelligence that was used in killing a dozen Russian generals is evidence of this. Nonetheless, President Biden is trying to be extra cautious about not escalating the conflict even more with Putin.

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*The UPDATES were written by Graham Nau,  
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## Recommended Readings

Baker, Peter, "Biden Speeds Up Military Aid to Ukraine, Drawing U.S. Deeper Into War," *The New York Times* (May 9, 2022)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/09/us/politics/biden-lend-lease-ukraine-weapons-war.html>

"United with Ukraine," *US Department of State* (Apr 7, 2022)

<https://www.state.gov/united-with-ukraine/>