



What to expect from Biden at the G-20 Summit in Indonesia

Naomi Lim

November 14, 2022

Bali, Indonesia, has been transformed from a sun-seeker mecca into a diplomatic focal point as heads of government from the world's biggest economies come together for the G-20 summit over the next couple of days.

President Joe Biden and his counterparts are set to stress-test the intergovernmental organization, comprising 85% of the world's economy, as they discuss common concerns under very different circumstances from when the economic forum first became a leaders dialogue after the Great Recession. They include Russia's war in Ukraine and China's continued rise in the region, both prominent member states.

Here are a handful of developments that are likely to unfold during Biden's second presidential trip to Asia, this time to Cambodia and Indonesia, after his outreach to Japan and South Korea last May.

Like the finance ministers meeting last month and the East Asia Summit last weekend, the G-20 leaders will probably not coalesce around a communique condemning Russia's war in Ukraine considering the former's membership. This week's G-20 gathering is the first since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered troops to invade Ukraine, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky poised to appear at the forum remotely.

Kelly Ann Shaw, one of former President Donald Trump's G-20 lead trade negotiators, described the summit's high stakes amid economic turmoil and inflation, Russia's war in Ukraine and its contribution to the energy and food crises, and increased military tensions in the South China Sea.

"On the other hand, the G-20 is a consensus-based body, and as a group, it's deeply divided," she told the *Washington Examiner*. "Russia is one challenge, but it's not the only one. President Biden has said he doesn't plan to hold back in terms of calling out Putin, and other nations will likely follow suit, which makes it unlikely that the G-20 will reach any meaningful conclusions."

The G-20 distills international disagreement over Russia's war in Ukraine, with this year's host Indonesia, as well as 2023 and 2024 hosts India and South Africa, respectively, siding with countries, such as Brazil and China, in not cutting diplomatic and economic connections with the Kremlin, according to Eric Gomez, a senior fellow for defense at the Cato Institute

"An additional point on the Ukraine issue is the war's disruption on global food supplies," Gomez said. "Ensuring Ukrainian food exports, especially grain, will likely figure into the U.S. agenda and would be welcomed by most of the G-20."

Biden's first face-to-face meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping of his administration

Biden's participation in the G-20 summit has been overshadowed by one sideline meeting in particular, that with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The White House had downplayed Biden's first face-to-face encounter with Xi since taking office, which took place after Xi became the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong by securing an unprecedented third term as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. National security adviser Jake Sullivan and other senior administration officials underscored that their conversation was not to identify common ground but to "find ways to communicate" on complicated matters, at least according to one aide.

The U.S.-China relationship has been in "a bad state" since Biden and Xi's telephone call last summer regarding House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA) decision to travel to Taiwan, which China responded to with "large-scale Chinese military exercises," according to Gomez.

"The Biden administration also introduced new export controls in mid-October that aim to cripple China's ability to acquire critical U.S. technology that could be used to improve China's military and its general economic goal of high-tech dominance," he said. "China is also facing a gloomier economic outlook as zero-COVID policies disrupt its economic recovery and its GDP growth rate slows down."

Biden is similarly scheduled to sit down with the new prime ministers of Italy and the United Kingdom, Giorgia Meloni and Rishi Sunak, while he is in Indonesia. Biden risked offending Meloni, now a fellow G-7 leader, by citing her election win in September as evidence Italy's democracy, too, is strained.

A more confident Biden abroad after surprise midterm election victories at home

The White House has embraced the idea that Biden headed overseas with "the wind at his back" after Democrats outperformed expectations during last week's midterm elections. Democrats maintained control of the Senate last weekend thanks to the win of Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), while the party has 203 of the 218 House seats needed for a majority in that chamber. Republicans have 212. Even Biden acknowledged he was able to approach his Xi meeting from a "stronger position" due to the results.

"There was a strong rejection of political violence and voter intimidation, and there was an emphatic statement that, in America, the will of the people prevails," Biden added in his remarks following his meeting with Xi.

For Shaw, a Vandenberg Coalition adviser, Biden is buoyed after not being "politically devastated by a red wave the week before his trip" despite his average 42% approval-55% disapproval rating, according to *RealClearPolitics*.

"While he certainly has been weakened politically from where he was at the beginning of 2021, the U.S. elections were not a complete repudiation of his administration's policies," she said.

Gomez pointed to persistent economic problems, though October's annual inflation rate of 7.7% in the United States was not as painful as anticipated. But allies and partners, including the U.K. and the European Union, cannot say the same as Russian oil and natural gas sanctions hamper their economies this winter.

"Additionally, South Korea is displeased at recent U.S. legislation that could hurt Seoul's electric vehicle exports," he said. "It is unclear how the G-20 will try to address the post-pandemic economic recovery issue, but signs don't look promising for finding a solution."