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Biden praises Xi as 'smart, smart guy,' promises to 'hold China accountable'

Biden said he told Xi that he's 'not looking for confrontation,' but knows there will be 'steep, steep competition'

By Megan Henney | **FOXBusiness**

[President Biden](#) called [Chinese](#) President Xi Jinping a "smart, smart guy" during his Thursday press conference, even as he vowed to hold Beijing accountable for a multitude of human rights abuses and unfair trade practices.

Asked during his first formal news conference how he planned to address China and its growing status as a global economic powerhouse, Biden said he told Xi that he's "not looking for confrontation," but knows there will be "steep, steep competition."

CHINA'S XI JINPING WARNS OF TECH CRACKDOWN, ALIBABA PULLED FROM APP STORES

"We'll insist that China play by the international rules, fair competition, fair practices, fair trade," Biden said.

He spoke at length about what the U.S. needs to do in order to compete with China, including investing in American workers and science, reestablishing alliances with traditional U.S. allies and continuing to call attention to the human rights abuses in Beijing.

"We're going to hold China accountable to follow the rules," Biden said.

President Joe Biden speaks during a news conference in the East Room of the White House, Thursday, March 25, 2021, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci) ((AP Photo/Evan Vucci))

He framed the increased competition between Washington and Beijing as part of a broader battle between democracy and autocracy, saying that Xi "does not have a

democratic, with a small D, bone in his body, but he is a smart, smart guy."

The U.S., Biden said, has an obligation to prove that democracy works.

CHINA SETS 2021 GDP GROWTH AT OVER 6%

"China has 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," he said. "That's not going to happen on my watch."

Before assuming office, Biden gave scant details about how he planned to handle China, which many lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle consider to be a top adversary. Biden has kept the [Trump](#) administration's [tariffs on Chinese exports](#) in place, and previously said he plans to review the phase one trade deal that former President Donald Trump inked with [China](#) nearly one year ago.

The deal, signed at the beginning of January, requires China to purchase some \$200 billion in additional U.S. goods over the course of two years – a commitment that Beijing is nowhere close to meeting.

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Relations with China deteriorated under Trump, who made it a campaign priority to shrink the trade disparities between the U.S. and its allies. For nearly two years, the world's two largest economies engaged in a tit-for-tat trade war until Trump and Xi signed a partial trade deal in January 2020.

Under the agreement, the [White House](#) left in place a [25% tariff](#) on about \$250 billion in Chinese products.

Biden previously said he wants to conduct a full review of the existing agreement with China before making any decisions and consult with America's traditional Asian and [European](#) allies to "develop a coherent strategy."