

## WH rolls the dice on Indigenous Rights at Oak Flat

### The Headline

Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, is set to release in the coming weeks an environmental impact study that would [trigger](#) the [transfer](#) of Oak Flat Campground (2,200 acres of land east of Phoenix, Arizona) to Resolution Copper, a mining project owned by extractive giants Rio Tinto and BHP. Oak Flat is a sacred site to the San Carlos Apache and other indigenous people in the area, and the mining process will turn it into a two-mile-wide, 1,000-foot-deep crater, destroying the land and rendering it unusable for indigenous religious and cultural practice. How did Rio Tinto and BHP get this close to getting ahold of sacred land that they want to mine into oblivion? The way any corporation does anything: lobbying Congress to simply give it the land – pending this environmental impact study – in an addendum tucked away in the 2014 Pentagon budget.

Last week, indigenous communities came together with environmentalists, activists (including folks from Win Without War), and members of Congress from Arizona and New Mexico for vigil outside the White House “to pray that Biden reverses the destruction of a sacred site” and prevents the release of the environmental impact study, as Rep. Grijalva (D-AZ) [said](#) in his speech. During the vigil, Quechan Tribal President Jordan Joaquin said that the proposed mine would dig the DNA of Quechan tribal ancestors, and Quechan Council Member Jonathan Koteen said that Resolution Copper is “killing the land, the water and culture.” This anti-climate, anti-religious freedom move to transfer Oak Flat is just one more example in a long history of the U.S. government prioritizing corporate interests over indigenous rights.

Thankfully, there is still time to stop this mine from moving forward. Win Without War is leading a [petition](#) calling on Secretary Vilsack to not release the environmental impact study and stop Resolution Copper. As seen at the prayer vigil, congress is beginning to speak up.

What’s next: Secretary Vilsack’s decision is weeks away so it will come down to readers like you to call Congress, sign the above petition, and vocalize your opposition to the transfer. Media coverage of Oak Flat is growing, driven by the work of indigenous activists and their allies. With your help, we can turn that uptick in coverage into a crescendo.

### The Happenings

May 11th, 2:00-3:30 EDT: “Political Prisoners and the Future of Nicaragua,” [CSIS](#)

May 15th, 4:00-5:00 PM EDT: “The future of the US-Brazil relationship,” [Brookings Institution](#)

### The Spotlight

*In today’s spotlight, we interview [Tobita Chow](#), director at Justice is Global. You can follow him on Twitter [here](#).*

**1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in foreign policy as it relates to struggles for labor rights and other human rights? Do you have any lessons learned for folks starting a career with similar interests?**

I got interested in foreign policy through an interest in building international labor solidarity, which was a result of learning about global capitalism and also witnessing events like the Rana Plaza disaster and the ensuing protests 10 years ago. For example, I helped organize parts of US tours of labor activists from Bangladesh and China. When I founded Justice Is Global, which now deals heavily with foreign policy, it was originally envisioned as a project to support global labor standards.

But building international solidarity is easier said than done. It requires confronting the ways in which elites in all countries divide us along national lines. My interest in foreign policy began when I realized how elites use foreign policy—and the racist narratives embedded in foreign policy—to deepen national divisions and undermine solidarity between working class people in different countries. And that makes it easier for capitalists everywhere to maintain their power.

In particular, as someone of Chinese descent, I was invested in solidarity between workers in the US and China. But I also saw the risk of growing US-PRC tensions, which would undermine the potential to build that solidarity while also feeding racism here in the US. I was worried about this potential even before the Trump campaign, but those fears became more and more real as Trump won in 2016, started his trade war against China in 2018, and then used COVID-19 to sharply escalate racist Sinophobic sentiments.

I think one of the most important challenges for anyone who wants to get involved in foreign policy from a progressive, humanistic perspective is to stay grounded. Stay grounded in your own values and investment in these issues. Maintain connections with on-the-ground organizing in communities here in the US and abroad, as much as you can. I find mainstream foreign policy to be an inherently dehumanizing discourse. It tries to get you to look at billions of people, entire countries and regions as pawns in a game. You have to constantly and actively resist this.

**2): What is one thing you wish was better or more widely understood about global solidarity?**

Global solidarity is an essential way to increase our power, and the only way to find real solutions to the problems we face. The moments in our history when left and progressive forces have wielded the greatest power and were filled with the greatest ambition have also been the moments when we were animated by an global consciousness, a sense that the fates of all

people are connected, that the struggles we are engaged with here and now at the local or national level are linked to a bigger global struggle for universal liberation.

That global consciousness is grounded in material reality. It is a fact that the struggles that all people face within their local communities, or at the national level, are connected to global systems and forces that we can only confront through global solidarity. Economic inequality in every part of the world is produced by the structure of the global economy. Structural racism is a global structure, and racism at the national level and racism at the global level feed each other. Not to mention the obvious global challenges like climate change or pandemics.

This means that injustices created in other countries by U.S. foreign policy end up reinforcing a global system of oppression that hurts people in the U.S. as well. As MLK said, "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. What affects one directly affects all indirectly." As Marx said, "A nation that enslaves another forges its own chains." Solidarity means sympathizing with the plight of people elsewhere, but also seeing how your own fate is linked to theirs.

**3): Justice is Global fights against Sinophobia and advocates for a more diplomatic approach to U.S.-China relations. How do you see our China policy moving in the coming years?**

Both the Trump and Biden administrations have put us on a path of growing tensions over the years to come. The Biden administration has been a much more responsible manager of crises but has also fed long term escalation, for example through the semiconductor export ban. The conversation in DC and in most mainstream media has become hardened along a very hawkish line, often paranoid and feverish.

We need to pressure officials to cease actions and rhetoric that escalate tensions without solving any real problems; we need to promote forms of U.S.-China cooperation around shared challenges (for example, we are planning a campaign for U.S.-China cooperation on climate change); and we also need progressive approaches to some of the very real problems created by PRC policies (for example, [responsible ways to support Taiwan's security](#)).

Finally, we need to work towards [a more egalitarian global economy overall](#). The fundamental source of growing U.S.-China tensions lies in the long term dysfunctions of the neoliberal global economy since the 2008 financial crisis, which have fed a climate of zero-sum economic competition and the growth of nationalist ideologies in the U.S., China, and around the world. The only way to resolve this problem is by addressing the grotesque inequalities that exist between countries, creating a more egalitarian global economy that will also be healthier and less conducive to zero-sum nationalism. We need a vision of the future of the global economy in which the U.S. welcomes the continued rise of China, on the condition that it does so peacefully.

## Buried Ledes

India has surpassed China as the world's most populous country, with 1.425 billion people, in what [the Guardian reports](#) as “the most significant shift in global demographics since records began.” It is also the first time since the United Nations first began recording global population records, in 1950, that China has been overtaken.

Chess player Ding Liren is now [the first Chinese man](#) to win the World Chess Championship, defeating Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi. Because of this victory, China now has won both the men's and women's world chess championships. This is significant for Russia, which has dominated chess for most of the last century. Ding won about \$1.2 million, for his victory, while Nepomniachtchi won \$990,000 for second place.

The devastating effects of the climate crisis on our planet's health are widely reported. But did you know that two of the most popular types of coffees, Arabica and Robusta, are [at grave risk due to climate change](#)? Global warming could lead to decreased production of these coffee bean varieties, which would [threaten the livelihoods](#) of millions of coffee farmers. Luckily, farmers in Uganda – one of Africa's biggest coffee exporting countries – are growing a new variety that [better withstands heat, drought, and disease](#): Liberica excelsa.

The Coronation of King Charles III is on Saturday, but Biden won't be attending despite an invitation. Instead, Biden is [sending](#) the First Lady and a diplomatic envoy. No U.S. president [has ever attended](#) a royal coronation, since snubbing the British crown is among the finest of American traditions. Just to keep the peace, though, Biden has already accepted an invitation from King Charles for a state visit.

[Trivia is back!](#)