

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

Remarks at the Munich Security Conference "Special Edition 2021" and an Exchange With Reporters
February 19, 2021

[The President spoke from the White House via videoconference.]

The President. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. And it's great to be with Angela and Emmanuel. We just spent part of—from Washington's perspective—the morning together. But I want to say hello to everyone and thanks, you—at the Munich Conference for hosting this special session.

For decades, as you pointed out, I've participated in the Munich Security Conference—as a U.S. Senator, joining my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to affirm the importance of the transatlantic partnership; three times as the Vice President of the United States, including delivering the first international foreign policy address of the Obama-Biden administration in the first months we were in office.

And 2 years ago, as you pointed out, when I last spoke at Munich, I was a private citizen; I was a professor, not an elected official. But I said at that time, "We will be back." And I'm a man of my word. America is back.

I speak to you today as President of the United States at the very start of my administration, and I'm sending a clear message to the world: America is back. The transatlantic alliance is back. And we are not looking backward; we are looking forward, together.

It comes down to this: The transatlantic alliance is a strong foundation—the strong foundation—on which our collective security and our shared prosperity are built. The partnership between Europe and the United States, in my view, is and must remain the cornerstone of all that we hope to accomplish in the 21st century, just as we did in the 20th century.

The challenges we face today are different. We're at an inflection point. When I spoke to you as a Senator and as even as Vice President, the global dynamics have shifted. New crises demand our attention. And we cannot focus only on the competition among countries that threaten to divide the world or only on global challenges that threaten to sink us all together if we fail to cooperate. We must do both, working in lockstep with our allies and partners.

So let me erase any lingering doubt: The United States will work closely with our European Union partners and the capitals across the continent—from Rome to Riga—to meet the range of shared challenges we face.

We continue to support the goal of a Europe whole and free and at peace. The United States is fully committed to our NATO alliance, and I welcome your—Europe's growing investment in the military capabilities that enable our shared defense.

You know, to me and to the United States, and to us, we'll keep article—we'll keep faith with article 5. It's a guarantee. An attack on one is an attack on all. That is our unshakable vow. And the only time article 5 has been invoked was after the United States was attacked on 9/11. You, our allies, joined us to fight Al Qaida, and the United States committed to consulting closely with our NATO allies and partners on the way forward in Afghanistan.

My administration strongly supports the diplomatic process that's underway and to bring an end to this war that is closing out 20 years. We remain committed to ensuring that Afghanistan

never again provides a base for terrorist attacks against the United States and our partners and our interests.

Our European partners have also stood with us to counter ISIS. Just this week, NATO Defense Ministers endorsed a significant expanded training-and-advisory mission in Iraq, which will be vital to the ongoing fight against ISIS. We cannot allow ISIS to reopen and regroup and threaten people in the Middle East, in Europe, in the United States, and elsewhere.

And while the United States is undergoing a thorough review of our own force posture around the world, I've ordered the halting of withdrawal of American troops from Germany. I'm also lifting the cap imposed by the previous administration on the number of U.S. forces able to be based in Germany.

I know the past few years have strained and tested our transatlantic relationship, but the United States is determined—determined—to reengage with Europe, to consult with you, to earn back our position of trusted leadership. Earlier today, as was referenced, I participated in the first meeting of the G-7 leaders, where I spoke about the dire need to coordinate multilateral action to address COVID-19, the global economic crisis, and the accelerating climate crisis, and so much else.

Achieving these goals is going to depend on a core strategic proposition, and that is: The United States must renew America's enduring advantages so that we can meet today's challenges from a position of strength. That means building back better our economic foundations, reclaiming our place in international institutions, lifting up our values at home and speaking out to defend them around the world, modernizing our military capabilities while leading with diplomacy, revitalizing America's network of alliances and partnerships that have made the world safer for all people.

You know, I hope our fellow democracies are going to join us in this vital work. Our partnerships have endured and grown through the years because they are rooted in the richness of our shared democratic values. They're not transactional. They're not extractive. They're built on a vision of a future where every voice matters, where the rights of all are protected and the rule of law is upheld.

None of this has fully succeeded in this—none of us has fully succeeded in this division [vision].* We continue to work toward it. And in so many places, including in Europe and the United States, democratic progress is under assault.

I have known for—I've known many of you for a long, long time, and you know that I speak my mind, so let me be straightforward with you all: We are in the midst of a fundamental debate about the future and direction of our world. We're at an inflection point between those who argue that, given all the challenges we face—from the fourth industrial revolution to a global pandemic—that autocracy is the best way forward, they argue, and those who understand that democracy is essential—essential—to meeting those challenges.

Historians are going to examine and write about this moment as an inflection point, as I said. And I believe that—every ounce of my being—that democracy will and must prevail. We must demonstrate that democracy can still deliver for our people in this changed world. That, in my view, is our galvanizing mission.

Democracy doesn't happen by accident. We have to defend it, fight for it, strengthen it, renew it. We have to prove that our model isn't a relic of history, it's the single best way to

* White House correction.

revitalize the promise of our future. And if we work together with our democratic partners, with strength and confidence, I know we'll meet every challenge and outpace every challenger.

You know, we must prepare together for long-term strategic competition with China. How the United States, Europe, and Asia work together to secure the peace and defend our shared values and advance our prosperity across the Pacific will be among the most consequential efforts we undertake. Competition with China is going to be stiff. That's what I expect, and that's what I welcome, because I believe in the global system Europe and the United States, together with our allies in the Indo-Pacific, worked so hard to build over the last 70 years.

We can own the race for the future. But to do so, we have to be clear eyed about the historic investments and partnerships that this will require. We have to protect—we have to protect—for space for innovation, for intellectual property, and the creative genius that thrives with the free exchange of ideas in open, democratic societies. We have to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared broadly and equitably, not just by a few.

We have to push back against the Chinese Government's economic abuses and coercion that undercut the foundations of the international economic system. Everyone—everyone—must play by the same rules. U.S. and European companies are required to publicly disclose corporate governance—to corporate governance structures and abide by rules to deter corruption and monopolistic practices. Chinese companies should be held to the same standard.

We must shape the rules that will govern the advance of technology and the norms of behavior in cyberspace, artificial intelligence, biotechnology so that they are used to lift people up, not used to pin them down. We must stand up for the democratic values that make it possible for us to accomplish any of this, pushing back against those who would monopolize and normalize repression.

You know, this is also how we're going to be able to meet the threat from Russia. The Kremlin attacks our democracies and weaponizes corruption to try to undermine our system of governance. Russian leaders want people to think that our system is more corrupt or as corrupt as theirs. But the world knows that isn't true, including Russians—Russia's own citizens.

Putin seeks to weaken European—the European project and our NATO alliance. He wants to undermine the transatlantic unity and our resolve, because it's so much easier for the Kremlin to bully and threaten individual states than it is to negotiate with a strong and closely united transatlantic community.

That's why standing up for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine remains a vital concern for Europe and the United States. That's why addressing recklessness—Russian recklessness—and hacking into computer networks, in the United States and across Europe and the world, has become critical to protecting our collective security. The challenges with Russia may be different than the ones with China, but they're just as real.

And it's not about pitting East against West. It's not about, we want a conflict. We want a future where all nations are able to freely determine their own path without a threat of violence or coercion. We cannot and must not return to the reflective [reflexive]* opposition and rigid blocs of the cold war. Competition must not lock out cooperation on issues that affect us all. For example, we must cooperate if we're going to defeat COVID-19 everywhere.

My first Presidential national security memorandum focused on surging health and humanitarian responses to defeat COVID-19 and to better prevent and prepare for the next

* White House correction.

pandemic. Today I'm announcing that the United States is making a \$2 billion pledge to COVAX, with the promise of an additional \$2 billion to urge others to step up as well.

Yet, even as we fight to get out of the teeth of this pandemic, the resurgence of Ebola in Africa is a stark reminder that we must simultaneously work to finally finance health security, strengthen global health systems, and create early warning systems to prevent, detect, and respond to future biological threats, because they will keep coming. We have to work together to strengthen and reform the World Health Organization. We need a U.N. system focused on biological threats that can move quickly to trigger action.

Similarly, we can no longer delay or do the bare minimum to address climate change. This is a global, existential crisis, and we'll all suffer—we will all suffer—the consequences if we fail. We have to rapidly accelerate our commitments to aggressively curb our emissions and to hold one another accountable for meeting our goals and increasing our ambitions.

That's why, as President, I immediately rejoined the Paris Agreement, and as of today, the United States is officially once again a party to the Paris Agreement, which we helped put together. On Earth Day, I will host a leaders' summit to help drive more ambitious actions among top emitters, including domestic climate action here in the United States.

I am grateful—I'm grateful—for Europe's continued leadership on climate issues over the last 4 years. Together, we need to invest in the technological innovations that are going to power our clean energy futures and enable us to build clean energy solutions to global markets.

The threat of nuclear proliferation also continues to require careful diplomacy and cooperation among us. We need transparency and communication to minimize the risk of strategic misunderstanding or mistakes. That's why the United States and Russia, notwithstanding other competition, extended the New START Treaty for an additional 4 [5]* years once I came—I was sworn in.

That's why we have said we're prepared to reengage in negotiations with the P5-plus-1 on Iran's nuclear program. We must also address Iran's destabilizing activities across the Middle East, and we're going to work in close cooperation with our European and other partners as we proceed. We'll also work together to lock down fissile and radiological material to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring or using them.

Look, the range of challenges Europe and the United States must take on together is broad and complex. And I'm eager to hear next from my good friends and outstanding leaders, Chancellor Merkel, about her thoughts on the way forward together.

So let me conclude with this: We cannot allow self-doubt to hinder our ability to engage each other or the larger world. The last 4 years have been hard. But Europe and the United States have to lead with confidence once more, with faith in our capacities, a commitment to our own renewal, with trust in one another and the ability of Europe and the United States to meet any challenge to secure our futures together.

I know we can do this. We've done it before. Just yesterday—after a 7-month, 300-million mile journey—NASA successfully landed the *Perseverance* rover on Mars. It's on a mission of exploration, with elements contributed by our European partners, to seek evidence of the possibility of life beyond our planet and the mysteries of the universe.

Over the next few years—"Percy", as it's being called—the *Perseverance* will range and collect samples from the Red Planet and pile them up so another mission and rover, envisioned as

* White House correction.

a joint effort between NASA and the European Space Agency, will retrieve this trove of scientific wonders and bring it home to all of us.

That's what we can do together. If our unbound capacity to carry us to Mars and back don't tell us anything else, they tell us we can meet any challenge we can face on Earth. We have everything we need. And I want you to know the United States will do—we'll do our part. We'll stand with you. We'll fight for our shared values. We'll meet the challenges of this new moment in history.

America is back. So let's get together and demonstrate to our great, great grandchildren, when they read about us, that democracy—democracy—democracy functions and works, and together, there is nothing we can't do. So let's get working.

Thank you all very much. Thank you, folks.

[At this point, the President's concluded his virtual remarks and answered questions from reporters in the room as follows.]

Severe Winter Storms in Texas

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible]—the Texas Governor's request for a major disaster declaration?

The President. Yes, I had a chance to speak with the Governor again last night, and I asked him whether he was about to ask for another effort to—because the circumstances Texas finds itself in—whether he was going to seek additional assistance. And we talked—I talked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA—the Administrator. This afternoon I'm going to ask him to accelerate our response and request for, quote—it's a different declaration—a "major disaster declaration" so that we can get everything done that we need that's possible to get done with Federal Government help.

FEMA is already there and providing support—generators, diesel fuel, water, blankets, and other supplies. But I've directed Health and Human Services—HHS—Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Defense to identify other resources—other resources that can provide and address the growing needs of the folks in Texas.

And as a little bit along the lines I was just talking about, when any State—as I said when I ran, I'm going to be a President for all of America—all—red, blue; there's no red or blue. It's all about commitment to—the American people make to one another. And so we're going to sign that declaration once it's in front of me. And God willing, it will bring a lot of relief to a lot of Texans.

And so thank you all so very much.

The President's Travel Schedule

Q. Do you have any plans to visit Texas, Mr. President?

The President. Say again.

Q. Do you have any plans to visit Texas?

The President. It depends. The answer is yes. The question is, I had planned on being in Texas the middle of next week, but what I don't want to be is a burden. When the President lands in any city in America, it creates—there's a—it has a long tail. And they're working like the devil to take care of their folks. If in fact it's concluded that I can do it without creating a burden for the folks on the ground while they're dealing with this crisis, I plan on going. But I'll—we'll know that—we'll make that decision probably the beginning of next week.

Okay? Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:17 a.m. from the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Wolfgang Ischinger, chairman, Munich Security Conference, who introduced the President; Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany; President Emmanuel Macron of France; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Gov. Gregory W. Abbott of Texas; and Federal Emergency Management Agency Acting Administrator Robert J. Fenton, Jr. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Munich Security Conference "Special Edition 2021," virtual remarks; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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Names: Abbott, Gregory W.; Fenton, Robert J., Jr.; Ischinger, Wolfgang; Macron, Emmanuel; Merkel, Angela; Obama, Barack; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; China : Economic growth and development; China : Trade and economic policies; Commerce, international : Group of Seven (G-7) nations; Commerce, international : Intellectual property law, strengthening efforts; Coronavirus pandemic, international cooperation efforts; Defense and national security : Cybersecurity :: Cyber attacks; Disaster assistance : Texas; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Paris Agreement; Europe : Relations with U.S.; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic security, strengthening efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Foreign aid policies and funding; Foreign policy, U.S. : Peace efforts, expansion; France : President; Germany : Chancellor; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iran : Regional involvement; Munich Security Conference "Special Edition 2021"; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia : Cyber attacks on U.S. and others; Russia : President; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., expansion; Russia : U.S. elections, interference; Science and technology : Research and development; Space program : Aeronautics and Space Administration, National; Space program : Mars exploration; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist organization; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Global threat; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Texas : Disaster assistance; Texas : Governor; Texas : Severe winter storms, damage and recovery efforts; Ukraine : Relations with Russia; Ukraine : Russia, role; World Health Organization.

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