

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan
April 16, 2021

President Biden. Well, good afternoon. The Prime Minister has brought the sun out, so he can do about anything.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for being here. It's been my pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Suga to the White House. This is our first in-person meeting here, the first head of state that I've asked in my administration to come to the White House.

Yoshi, thank you for making the long trip to Washington. We've already met several times virtually on—at a G-7 meeting and a Quad leader summit, but I greatly appreciate the chance to spend time with you in person and to make our—exchange our ideas face to face. There's no substitute for face-to-face discussions.

We are still talking—taking COVID precautions, being careful. But our commitment to meet in person is indicative of the importance and the value we both place on this relationship between Japan and the United States, this partnership.

We had a very productive discussion today. When nations as close as ours get together, we always look for operations and opportunities to do more, and today was no exception. So, Yoshi, you'll probably be seeing a lot more of me in the future.

And today Prime Minister Suga and I affirmed our ironclad support for U.S.-Japanese alliance and for our shared security. We committed to working together to take on the challenges from China and on issues like the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as North Korea, to ensure a future of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Japan and the United States are two strong democracies in the region, and we're committed—we're committed—to defending and advancing our shared values, including human rights and the rule of law. We're going to work together to prove that democracies can still compete and win in the 21st century. We can deliver for our people, and in the face of a rapidly changing world.

So today we're announcing a new Competitive and Reliance [Resilience]* partnership—CoRe—between Japan and the United States that will enhance our ability—enhance our ability—to meet the pressing challenges of our time—together meet those challenges.

Top of our agenda is, of course, getting the pandemic under control and helping our friends and neighbors throughout the Indo-Pacific region to recover.

Earlier this year, we—together with India and Australia—launched the landmark Quad Vaccine Partnership to expand the manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and assist countries throughout the region with vaccination efforts. And we agreed to enhance our support for global vaccination efforts through the ACT Accelerator and COVID facility.

We're also going to do more beyond this pandemic to advance longer-term goals for health security, reform of the World Health Organization, and establishing a new partnership—a new partnership—on health security to build better preparedness for the next pandemic, because there will be others.

* White House correction.

Secondly, Japan and the United States are both deeply invested in innovation and looking to the future. That includes making sure we invest in and protect the technologies that will maintain and sharpen our competitive edge. And those technologies are governed by shared democratic norms that we both share, norms set by democracies, not by autocracies.

So we're going to work together across a range of fields: from promoting secure and reliable 5G networks; to increasing our cooperation on supply chains for critical sectors like semiconductors; to driving joint research in areas like AI, genomics, quantum computing, and much more.

Thirdly, our nations are committed to taking aggressive action to meet the threats of climate change. Next week, I'll be hosting the Climate Leaders Summit—which Prime Minister Suga also plans to attend, thankfully—to rally key nations of the world to making ambitious climate commitments in the lead up to the Glasgow summit later this year.

Japan and the United States are both committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, and we know to do that will require setting and meeting our 2030 goals. And we'll work together to advance clean energy technologies and help nations throughout the Indo-Pacific region, especially developing countries, develop renewable energies and decarbonize their economies.

And finally, both Prime Minister Suga and I value the incredible partnership that exists not just between our governments, but between the Japanese people and the American peoples.

Last month, we jointly marked the 10th-year anniversary of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster that cost so many lives in Japan. I visited that area shortly after it happened. In our private lunch, the Vice President—the Prime Minister and I talked about, when I was Vice President, visiting the families in the region to show support of the United States. We continue to mourn the loss of all those folks and to honor the extraordinary joint effort between Japan and the American people when the—in the wake of that tragedy, to recover and to rebuild.

And those personal bonds of friendship and constant—and connection, they're the ones that are going to keep this alliance strong and vibrant for decades to come.

And I'm especially proud that today we agreed to resume what we call—what is called the "Mansfield Fellowship Program" to promote people-to-people connections between our countries. Before Mike Mansfield—who was a beloved Ambassador to Japan—became Ambassador, he was a mentor of mine when I came to the Senate after my wife and daughter were killed, and he helped me along in ways I can't even explain in the United States Senate. And I'm proud—I'm proud—that this legacy continues to be honored as part of the close, enduring partnership between our nations.

And, Yoshi, I know how proud you are of—the people of Japan are in—you've got a Japanese boy coming over here, and guess what? He won the Masters. He won the Masters. He won the Green Jacket. And Matsuyama was the first Japanese player to take home that Green Jacket at the Masters Tournament this week. So let me say congratulations to Japan as well on that feat.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for making the trip. I look forward to all that Japan and United States will accomplish together in the coming years. It was a great honor having you as the first head of state in my administration.

The floor is yours.

Prime Minister Suga. It is truly a pleasure to be here in person visiting Washington, DC. I would like to thank President Biden and Vice President Harris, who have welcomed me so warmly. I also wish to extend my gratitude to all the members of the U.S. Government who have worked to prepare for this occasion.

The United States is Japan's best friend. Japan and the U.S. are allies that share universal values, such as freedom, democracy, and human rights. Our alliance has served its role as the foundation of peace and stability for the Indo-Pacific region and the world.

In light of the current regional situation and the severe security environment, the importance of our alliance has reached new heights. Based on such common recognition at today's summit, we engaged in far-reaching and candid exchange of views on each other's political principles, challenges faced in each of our nations, our common vision, and other matters.

President Biden and I reaffirmed the recognitions confirmed at the Japan-U.S. two-plus-two held last month, and agreed to engage in initiatives for the region based upon such recognitions.

We also discussed the free and open Indo-Pacific. We agreed that while Japan and the U.S. will take the lead to promote the vision through concrete efforts, we will also cooperate with other countries and regions, including the ASEAN, Australia, and India.

We also had serious talks on China's influence over the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific and the world at large. We agreed to oppose any attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East and South China Seas and intimidation of others in the region.

At the same time, we agreed on the necessity for each of us to engage in frank dialogue with China. And, in so doing, to pursue stability of international relations, while upholding universal values.

On North Korea, we confirmed our commitment to the CVID of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges and agreed to demand North Korea to fulfill its obligations under Security Council resolutions.

On the issue of abduction, we reaffirmed that it is a grave human rights issue and that our two countries will work together to seek immediate resolution by North Korea. Encountering North Korea, and for the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific, both of us recognize that trilateral cooperation, including the R.O.K., has never been as important as today, and agreed to promote such collaboration.

Noting that the regional security environment has become increasingly severe, the deterrence and response capabilities of our alliance must be strengthened. I conveyed my resolve to reinforce Japan's defense capabilities, while President Biden again demonstrated America's commitment to the defense of Japan, including the application of article 5 of the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security for the Senkaku Islands.

We also agree to accelerate the review underway between our two countries on the specific means to strengthen our alliance. At the same time, from the perspective of mitigating the impact on local communities, including, first and foremost, Okinawa, we agreed to promote the realignment of the U.S. forces in Japan, including the relocation of Air Station Futenma to Henoko, which is the only solution to avoid its permanent use.

In responding to the unprecedented crisis faced by the international community, such as COVID-19 and climate change, Japan and the U.S. are mutually indispensable partners. President Biden and I share the recognition that our two nations bear significant responsibilities to lead multilateral initiatives toward the resolution of such issues.

In this context, we agree to respect international order based upon multilateralism and the rule of law while exercising joint leadership to build back better our global community. Based on such outcome of our meeting today, we are releasing the Japan-U.S. joint leaders statement: "Global Partnership for a New Era," which will serve as the guiding post for our alliance in the times ahead, which strongly demonstrates our solidarity towards the realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

From the perspective of our two nation's leading efforts to build back better, President Biden and I agreed on the Japan-U.S. core partnership, and confirmed to promote cooperation in common priority areas, including promotion of competitiveness and innovation in digital science and technology, COVID-19 countermeasures, green growth, and climate change.

On competitiveness and innovation: Under the recognition that digital economy and new technologies, in particular, will bring about social transformation and huge economic opportunities, we have agreed that Japan and the U.S. will work together on the promotion of R&D on various areas, including digital area and others regarding response to COVID-19 from short-term responses to longer term efforts, including their preparations for future similar incidents.

We will work on the promotion of multilayered cooperations regarding the overall supply of vaccines and the reinforcement of Japan-U.S. public and private cooperation in the area of global health. We confirmed that cooperations between our governments will continue in order to ensure equitable access to vaccines, including access by developing countries, multilateral and regional cooperations will be promoted.

On the matter of climate change, at the upcoming Climate Summit to be hosted by the U.S. next week or at COP26 and beyond, we reconfirmed that Japan and the U.S. will lead the global decarbonization in order to further strengthen cooperation in areas such as the implementation of the Paris Agreement, clean energy technologies, or decarbonization transition of developing countries.

I agreed with President Biden to launch climate partnership on ambition decarbonization and clean energy. Under these initiatives, I wish to give impetus to concrete and comprehensive Japan-U.S. cooperations.

I discussed the increase of discriminations or violences against Asian people across the U.S. with President Biden and agreed that discrimination by race cannot be permitted in any societies. We agreed on this regard. President Biden's comment that discriminations and violences cannot be allowed and that he firmly opposes was extremely encouraging for me, and I have renewed my confidence in American democracy once again.

I told the President about my determination to realize the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games this summer as a symbol of a global unity. President Biden once again expressed his support for this determination. Japan is listening to and learning from WHO and experts, doing everything possible to contain infection and to realize safe and secure games. From scientific and objective perspectives, we will do our utmost in our preparation.

Freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law—as we firmly defend and uphold these universal values that Japan and the U.S. share, I look forward to the actual implementation of the outcomes of today's significant meeting and to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific by further collaboration and deeper cooperation with Joe.

I once again express my heartfelt gratitude for the kind invitation. Thank you.

President Biden. Now we will each take a few questions, and I'll begin by recognizing the Associated Press. Aamer [Aamer Madhani, Associated Press], you have the first question. There you are.

Gun Control/Background Check System

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. President, in your last press conference, you said successful Presidents prioritize and that you were focusing your agenda on one thing at a time.

And I'd like to just ask you: What would you say to many Americans who voted for you about the legislative progress on gun control and police reform having to wait while you pursue infrastructure, given that we continue to see these incidents with mass shootings and also police-involved shootings, including the incident that a lot of us saw in Chicago most recently? Do you feel any need to reprioritize your agenda?

President Biden. I've never not prioritized this. No one has worked harder to deal with the violence used by individuals using weapons than I have. I'm the only one ever to have passed an assault weapons ban. I'm the only one that ever got a 10-year ban on assault weapons and clips of more than 10 bullets.

Immediately upon us becoming in office, having an Attorney General, I asked him to put together the things I could do by Executive order, including dealing with new guns that can be made—you can buy in pieces and put together, and other initiatives.

I strongly support—I strongly support—the universal background checks, which I continue to push. The Congress has to step up and act. The Senate has to act. And I strongly support and continue—I've never stopped supporting the ban on assault weapons and magazines that hold more than 10 bullets.

It doesn't mean that I can't also be working at the same time on the economy and on COVID. But it's not a question of my being able to set the agenda in the Senate as to what they will move to first. And so I continue and I strongly, strongly urge my Republican friends in the Congress who even refused to bring up the House-passed bill to bring it up now.

This has to end. It's a national embarrassment. It is a national embarrassment what's going on. And it's not only these mass shootings that are occurring. Every single day—every single day, there's a mass shooting in this United—in the United States if you count all those who are killed out on the streets of our cities and our rural areas. It's a national embarrassment and must come to an end.

And one last thing: The folks who own weapons, the folks who own guns, they support universal background checks. The majority of them think we should not be selling assault weapons. Who, in God's name, needs a weapon that can hold 100 rounds or 40 rounds or 20 rounds? It's just wrong. And I'm not going to give up until it's done.

You have a question you want to offer? I mean, not a question—[laughter]—recognize someone, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Suga. Mr. Sugimoto, with Sankei Newspaper.

Q. Thank you very much. My name is Sugimoto of Sankei Newspaper. The summit—I believe that China policy was one of the central agenda items, so my question is on China policy. Both governments consider that peace and stability of Taiwan is of great importance and that had been the agreement between the two countries.

What kind of exchange of views were conducted on this matter at today's meeting? In order to deter contingency in the Straits, what can Japan do? And what can Japan do, when actually, a contingency occurs in the Taiwan Straits? Did the Prime Minister explain to President Biden what Japan can do under such circumstances?

And also, were there discussions on Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region human rights issue? Grave concern is shared by the two countries, but Japan is the only G-7 country that has not imposed sanctions on China. Were you able to gain President Biden's understanding towards such position?

Prime Minister Suga. As we engaged in an exchange of views over the regional situation, we also discussed the circumstances in Taiwan and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region as well.

I refrain from mentioning details since it pertains to diplomatic exchanges, but there is already an agreed recognition over the importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Straits between Japan and the United States, which was reaffirmed on this occasion.

I also explained Japan's position and initiatives regarding the situation in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to the President, who I think understood my points.

President Biden. Next question is—goes to Trevor [Trevor Hunnicutt, Reuters] of Reuters.

Iran/International Diplomatic Efforts

Q. Thank you. Mr. President, it's been a while since we've heard an update from you on how the talks are going with Iran. How are they going? And do you regard their decision to enrich to 60 percent as a step backwards, as a sign that they aren't serious about those negotiations?

And, for the Prime Minister, just a question on whether it's irresponsible to move forward with the Olympics when you have public health experts telling you that Japan is not ready to do so. Thank you.

President Biden. Let me respond to the Iran question. We do not support and do not think it's at all helpful that Iran is saying it's going to move to enrich to 60 percent. It is contrary to the agreement. We are, though, nonetheless pleased that Iran has continued to agree to engage in discussions—in direct discussions with us and with our partners on how we move forward and what is needed to allow us to move back into the JOPCA [JCPOA]* so that we are a part of it again—that we should have never gotten out of, in my view—without us making concessions that I'm—we're just not willing to make.

And so the discussions are underway. I think it's premature to make a judgement as to what the outcome will be, but we're still talking.

Prime Minister Suga. If I may invite Shintomi-san of Kyodo News.

Q. Yes, I have a question to Prime Minister Suga regarding the Tokyo Olympics and the Paralympics planned for this summer. You have garnered support from President Biden. Did the President mention about the concrete promise to send American athletes or any positive comments?

If you can tell us about the exchanges and the conversations during the meeting about the COVID-19 vaccines or about climate change. You have discussed these aspects about the schedule of providing the vaccines or, by 2030, the reduction target of the gases. Any numerical targets or actions were discussed, please?

Prime Minister Suga. As was mentioned at the beginning, I expressed my determination to realize the Tokyo Olympics and the Paralympic Games as a symbol of global unity this summer. And President Biden, once again, expressed his support.

Japan will continue careful and full preparation in order to realize the Tokyo Games this summer, in order to ensure equitable access to vaccines for COVID-19. We also affirmed that Japan and the U.S. will continue our cooperation.

Regarding the climate change, this is a matter that both President Biden and I emphasize. So, during the talk today, we have confirmed to strengthen bilateral cooperation and collaboration in

* White House correction.

the area of climate change and have agreed to launch the Japan-U.S. Climate Partnership, which is extremely meaningful and significant.

President Biden. Well, thank you all very much. And thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. I look forward to having you back.

Thank you again, everyone.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:05 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to professional golfer Hideki Matsuyama. Prime Minister Suga and two reporters spoke in Japanese, and their remarks were translated by interpreters.

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