

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

**Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to Departure for Kansas City,
Missouri**

December 8, 2021

Q. How was the——

Q. [Inaudible]—Putin?

Q. Mr. President, are you confident that Vladimir Putin got the message?

Q. Mr. President——

The President. I have—there's some good news this morning: That Pfizer lab report came back saying that the expectation is that the existing vaccines protect against Omicron, but if you get the booster, you're really in good shape. And so that's very encouraging. There's more—that's the lab report. That's the lab report. There's more study going on. But that's very, very encouraging.

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia/Ukraine

Q. What have you achieved by talking with Putin yesterday?

The President. He asked about you a lot. He talked about you a lot.

Q. Are you confident that Vladimir——

The President. No—no, wait. Hang——

Q. ——Putin got the message, sir?

Q. How are you going to get Manchin over the finish line, Mr. President?

Q. Can you answer, sir, please?

The President. Yes, I will.

Q. Joe Manchin says——

Q. Mr. President, will you have him in person——

Q. Can you answer my question first?

The President. Shh. Shh. Let me—the meeting with Putin, I was very straightforward. There were no minced words. It was polite, but I made it very clear: If in fact he invades Ukraine, there will be severe consequences—severe consequences—and economic consequences like none he's ever seen or ever have been seen, in terms of being imposed.

He knows. His immediate response was, he understood that. And I indicated that I knew he would respond. But beyond that, if in fact we would probably also be required to reinforce our presence in NATO countries to reassure particularly those on the eastern front. In addition to that, I made it clear that we would provide the defensive capability to the Ukrainians as well.

The good news is—the good news—the positive news is that, thus far, our teams have been in constant contact. We hope by Friday we're going to be able to say and I'll announce to you that we're having meetings at a higher level, not just with us, but with at least four of our major NATO allies and Russia to discuss the future of Russia's concerns relative to NATO writ large and whether or not we can work out any accommodations as it relates to bringing down the temperature along the eastern front.

Ukraine/North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Q. Can we rule out boots on the ground, sir, putting U.S. troops on the ground?

The President. Yes. In terms of in Ukraine?

Q. Senator Tim Kaine, Democrats talking about could U.S. troops be needed on the ground in or around Ukraine to stop an invasion. Will you rule that out, or is that on the table?

The President. That is not on the table. What is not on—they are not—we have a moral obligation and a legal obligation to our NATO allies, if they were to attack under article 5. It's a sacred obligation. That obligation does not extend to NATO—I mean, to Ukraine. But it would depend upon what the rest of the NATO countries were willing to do as well.

But the idea the United States is going to unilaterally use force to confront Russia from invading Ukraine is not on—in the cards right now. But what will happen is: There will be severe consequences that will have——

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia

Q. Sir, you've known Vladimir Putin for years.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Are you confident that he got the message and knows this is different?

The President. I am absolutely confident he got the message.

Thank you.

Q. Have you seen——

Q. [Inaudible]

Q. Have you talked to Joe Manchin? Mr. President, have you talked to Joe Manchin?

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:59 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to boarding Marine One. A reporter referred to Sen. Joseph A. Manchin III.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich.

Subjects: Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Health and medical care : Research and development; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia : President; Russia : Relations with U.S.; Russia : Relations with Ukraine; Ukraine : Russia, role; Ukraine : U.S. assistance.

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