

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and an Exchange With Reporters

June 13, 2023

President Biden. Well, Mr. Secretary General, it's great to have you here. It's good to see you again.

And the—I apologize for having to reschedule yesterday. I had a lot of fun yesterday afternoon. *[Laughter]* We—I had a little toothache problem they took care of. And thank you for accommodating me.

And your leadership in the alliance has through—been through a really significant period, in terms of dealing with NATO's relationship with Ukraine. And you know, I think you've done an incredible job.

We saw each other last in Warsaw. And I think you said it, and I agree: The NATO allies have never been more united. We both worked like hell to make sure that happened. *[Laughter]* And so far, so good.

And I think it's—and we see our joint strength in modernizing the relationship within NATO, as well as providing assistance to defense capabilities to Ukraine.

And we see it in Finland's recent accession into NATO. I remember you and I talking—I think I said to you; I know I said to others—that Putin was making a mistake. He was looking for the Finlandization of NATO. He got the NATOization of Finland—

Secretary General Stoltenberg. Yes.

President Biden. —and hopefully, Sweden very shortly.

And the—your friendship and leadership has meant a great deal.

We're strengthened—we also—we've strengthened NATO's eastern flank, made it clear that we'll defend every inch of NATO territory. And I say it again: The commitment of the United States to NATO's article 5 is rock solid.

And, at our summit in Lithuania next month, we're going to be building on that momentum, from working to ensure that allies spend enough on the defense, the 2 percent—not just as a hike, but that's the bottom line.

And NATO's engagement as well, we—you know, I've kept you completely informed of my discussions with Japan and South Korea and the Pacific. I think this is the first time ever we've had a major Pacific power engaged in dealing with aggression in Europe.

And so I want to thank you again, Secretary General, for your partnership, your friendship, and most importantly, your leadership of NATO.

Secretary General Stoltenberg. President Biden, dear Joe, thank you so much for the warm words. And thank you for taking the time to meet with me, once again, here at the White House. It's really a great honor and pleasure to meet you.

But most of all, thank you for your leadership, for your strong, personal commitment to the transatlantic bond, to Europe and North America standing together.

And let me also thank the U.S. Congress and the people of America for the strong support to Ukraine. And you just made a new announcement of additional U.S. support, and that is something which is very much welcomed.

European allies and Canada are also doing their part, with tens of billions in military and economic support for Ukraine. And the support that we are providing together to Ukraine is now making a difference on the battlefield as we speak, because the offensive is launched, and the Ukrainians are making progress, making advances.

It's still early days, but what we do know is that the more land Ukrainians are able to liberate, the stronger hand they will have at the negotiating table, and also, the more likely it will be that President Putin at some stage will understand that he will never win this war of aggression on—at the battle—on the battlefield.

Then I think we also have to realize that Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine was not only an attack on Ukraine, but also on our core values and on free people everywhere. And therefore, President Putin must not win this war, because that will not only be a tragedy for Ukrainians, but also make the world more dangerous.

It will be—send a message to authoritarian leaders all over the world, also China, that when they use military force, they get what they want, and we will then become more vulnerable. So it's our security interest to support Ukraine.

And that's exactly what we will do when we meet—all the NATO leaders—at the summit in Vilnius next month, where we'll agree to sustain and step up our support to Ukraine, further strengthen our deterrence on defense, including by new commitment to invest more in defense. And I expect allies to agree that 2 percent of GDP for defense has to be a minimum of what allies have to invest in our shared security.

We'll strengthen our partnership with our Indo-Pacific partners. And then, of course, we all look forward to welcoming Sweden as a full-fledged member of the alliance as soon as possible.

So, once again, Mr. President, thank you for your leadership. Thank you for your strong commitment. And I look forward to welcome you at the NATO summit in Vilnius.

President Biden. Well, in no small part because of your leadership, we've got—beyond NATO, we've gotten another 30-something—well, a total of 40 nations that are committed to the independence of Ukraine. And I think it's a real clear message.

So, God willing, we're going to be able to keep this unity up. And thank you for your leadership.

Q. President, have you discussed——

Q. Mr. President, have you read the Trump indictment, sir?

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—Ukrainian——*

Q. Do you agree with Dr. Biden that she was surprised Republicans——

[*At this point, several reporters spoke at once.*]

Ukraine

Q. Sir, how's that offensive going, do you think? How's the offensive going, do you think?

President Biden. I'll let Ukraine think for themselves.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:14 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A reporter referred to former President Donald J. Trump. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Secretary General Stoltenberg.

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