

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine and an Exchange With Reporters in Vilnius, Lithuania

July 12, 2023

President Biden. Well, Mr. President, welcome. And I hope you all got a sense today from all of my colleagues that—how much that you have—how much support you have. It's real. And I hope we finally have put to bed the notion about whether or not Ukraine is welcome in NATO. It's going to happen. We're moving—you're all moving in the right direction. And I think it's just a matter of getting by the next few months here.

So thank you, thank you, thank you.

And you know, it's hard to believe: 500 days. It's easy for me just mostly—I've been in and out of Ukraine a lot before the war, and some since the war. But I'm going to say again what I've said to you many times, not only all of you, but your people—your sons, your daughters, your husbands, your wives, your friends: You're incredible.

Ukraine—the whole world has seen the courage—I really—I mean this from the bottom of my heart—the courage and commitment of the average Ukrainian. When you see a 65-year-old woman on television after her apartment's been bombed out, picking up the pieces and going to help the next-door neighbor—I mean, it's just astounding. You've set an example for the whole world of what constitutes genuine courage in my—I mean—from the bottom of my heart, I mean that—what courage means. And you know, I think it's—your resilience and your resolve has been a model for the whole world to see.

And the frustration, I can only imagine. I know you're many times frustrated about when things—what things get to you quickly enough and what's getting to you and how we're getting there. But I promise you, the United States is doing everything we can to get you what you need as rapidly as we can get it to you.

And the Secretary of Defense has been a constant, constant—how can I say it?—the refrain—from the Defense Department and everywhere else to—and calling other Secretaries of Defense around the world to say, "Let's get some help."

So I just want you to know it's real. And you know, here in Vilnius, we held the first, as you well know, NATO-Ukraine Council. But you and I talked about this beforehand, about the commitments—the security commitments we were going to make while it becomes official—until it becomes official. And I think that's important.

And I might—I want to tell you: When I got here, Mr. President, and I started to sell that idea to other heads of state, there was no reluctance. There was no—"Well, I don't want to"—[inaudible]—it was—everybody just said: "Okay. Let's sign on." So it's real.

You've done an enormous job. You have a lot more to do, I know. And I just think that, you know, we're going to make sure that you get what you need. And I look forward to the day when we're having the meeting celebrating your official—official—membership in NATO.

So thank you for what you're doing. And the bad news for you is, we're not going anywhere. [Laughter] You're stuck with us.

So thank you.

President Zelenskyy. Thank you very much, Mr. President. And I will start.

You said about 500 days. It's really, really a difficult job for our people—soldiers and civilians, mothers, fathers, and children—really, to fight for their life—for their life and for these values.

And thank you very much that all these days you are with us. I mean, you and Americans, all of America—Americans and Congress. I mean, thank you, Mr. President, that you—like we say, shoulder to shoulder with us from first days of full-scale war. We appreciate for this very much.

And really—really, you know, we understand you're leading support, because when you give such messages and when you gave sometimes some weapon—I'm sorry that I'm—but I want to say to journalists, like I said during our meeting, our council, that it's very simple, you know, to criticize, for example, clusters munition, which you made decision—difficult political decision. But it's—but you have to know that Russia used such weapon from the first days, not only full-scale war—from first days of occupation of Crimea, from 2014 and '15, in all our territories. In Donbas, they used it. And now they continue doing. And that you gave us—this decision will help us to save us.

And that's why my appreciation for the—and I didn't hear from all the, you know, parts of the world when Russia began to use it—I didn't hear that some of, you know, countries criticized Russia. You know? But I think that it was very useful to put them.

So thank you so much for this help. We really counted on it—not only on this. I mean this—totally. And you gave us huge support.

I want to thank to all Americans. We understand that it's more than 43 billions for today. It's big support. And I understand that it's all your money, but you have to know that you spend this money for—not just for fighting; you spend this money for our lives. And the—I think that we save the lives for Europe and for all the world.

So thank you very much for this also summit. At the end of the summit, we had—I think this council had great success and security guarantees, as you said, that we began to speak it—about it in Kyiv.

So now we see that we had—you had great idea, that G-7—and now I know that—last message is—that also there are countries which joined to G-7 decisions, and I think it will help very much because it—it's real effect that—it's very—[inaudible]—phase.

So thank you.

President Biden. Well, thank you. And thank you for acknowledging the American people. I think it's correct that we are a large country, but I think we've given more than every other nation combined in terms of assistance and cost.

And the American people are supportive—they're supportive—because they know it's about you, but it's about more than you. It's about innocent people around the world and the absolute brutality with which Putin is acting and the Russians are moving on. It's just—it's just some—like something out of the 14th century the way they're acting.

And so—but I can't emphasize enough.

And by the way, I know you thanked him, but I think we talked about it before. I went to Tokyo years—more—a couple years ago. The idea that Kishida is increasing their defense budget, having to lower their domestic budget, to aid directly and get directly involved in what's happening in Ukraine is remarkable.

The sad, sad news is, you're in this situation. The incredible news is, it's bringing the world together. It's bringing the world together in a way that—it's a hell of a price to pay, but it's

bringing the world together. And people are realizing that they just can't stand by and let this kind of aggression occur.

Any rate, I thank you, and we've got a lot to talk about. So somebody is going to have to say, "The press has to leave." [Laughter]

Q. President Zelenskyy, are you satisfied with what you got from NATO? You were so frustrated yesterday. Is this enough? Are you satisfied, sir?

President Zelenskyy. I think, at the end of summit, we have great unity from our leaders and security guarantees, that the success for this summit. I think so, but it's my opinion. Thank you.

Q. Thank you, sir.

Ukraine/North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Q. President Zelenskyy, how soon after the war would you like to be in NATO? How soon after the war would you like to join NATO?

President Biden. An hour and 20 minutes. You guys ask really insightful questions.
[Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:01 p.m. at the Lithuanian Exhibition and Congress Centre. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Vilnius, Lithuania; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Ukraine, President Zelenskyy.

Locations: Vilnius, Lithuania.

Names: Austin, Lloyd J., III; Kishida, Fumio; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Zelenskyy, Volodymyr.

Subjects: Japan, Prime Minister; Lithuania, President Biden's visit; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia : President; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Secretary of Defense; Ukraine : President; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Ukraine, U.S. assistance.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300617.