

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks in Vilnius, Lithuania

July 12, 2023

The President. Hello, Lithuania! As my mother would say, "God love you." No seats. Holy mackerel. [*Laughter*]

It's good to be back in Vilnius, a nation and a region that knows better than anyone the transformational power of freedom. You know, you showed the world that the strength of a people united cannot be denied.

And together, with your brothers and sisters in Estonia and Latvia, you helped end the era of division through the power of connection. The Baltic Way, not the Berlin Wall, became the symbol for Europe's future.

And later, when Soviet tanks sought once more to deny your independence, the people of Vilnius said, "No." No, no, no. And in January of 1991, tens of thousands of citizens, unarmed and unyielding, came for their own—of their own accord, standing as one to protect the TV Tower, to shield the Supreme Council, and defend freedom.

Fourteen heroes tragically lost their lives. Hundreds were wounded. But the whole world saw that decades of oppression had done nothing to dim the flame of liberty in this country. I mean it. It's consequential.

The light of Lithuania: You kept it strong. You kept it bright. And you kept the light shining here in Vilnius and in Washington, DC, where the yellow, green, and red of your flag flew every day.

This past year, we've celebrated a hundred years of unbroken diplomatic relationship between the United States and the Baltic States. America—America—never recognized the Soviet occupation of the Baltics. Never, never, never, Mr. President.

And besides, you've got a great President. [*Applause*] Stand up. No, stand up. As your President can tell you, the bonds between Lithuanian and the American people have never faltered.

And just 7 months after the bloody January crackdown, the first foreign visitor to have their passports stamped here in Lithuania with visas of this—to this new, reborn state were a planeload of Lithuanian Americans from Chicago, Illinois. [*Applause*] Oh. [*Laughter*] And their families are still proud of that.

Audience member. From Los Angeles.

The President. Los Angeles came after that. [*Laughter*] A lot came after.

Look, many aboard that plane had fled Lithuania during the early years of Soviet oppression and marveled—marveled—at their return to this independent state. One of them told reporters, quote, "This day is like a resurrection for us." "This day, Father, is like a resurrection for us." That's what the quote was, for real. That's the feeling.

And it was: a resurrection that quickly became a revelation. And a nation which stands today as a stronghold of liberty and opportunity, a proud member of the European Union and of NATO.

I had the great honor as a United States Senator of championing Lithuania and other Baltic States to join NATO in 2004. Wasn't I brilliant doing that? [*Laughter*] But, all kidding aside, think about what it—how it's changed things. Think about what's happened.

Now, over the last few days, as President of the United States, I had the honor of participating in a historic NATO summit hosted by Lithuania, where we welcomed NATO's newest ally, Finland, and reached agreement to bring Sweden into the alliance as soon as possible. And President Erdogan kept his word.

We've witnessed your historic journey. And I'm proud to call Lithuania friend, partner, and ally. Ally. Ally.

Soon, NATO will be the 32d freestanding—have free—30 free—32 freestanding members—[laughter]—standing together to defend our people and our territory, beyond—beyond all the rest, bound by democratic values to make us strong and by our sacred oath that an attack against—it is a sacred oath—attack against one is an attack against all. Because each member of NATO knows that the strength of our people and the power of our unity cannot be denied.

If I sound optimistic, it's because I am. Today, our alliance remains a bulwark of global security and stability as it's been for more than seven decades. NATO is stronger, more energized, and, yes, more united than ever in its history. Indeed, more vital to our shared future.

It didn't happen by accident. It wasn't inevitable.

When Putin, and his craven lust for land and power, unleashed his brutal war on Ukraine, he was betting NATO would break apart. He was betting NATO would break. He thought our unity would shatter at the first testing. He thought democratic leaders would be weak. But he thought wrong.

Faced with a threat—[applause]. Faced with a threat to the peace and stability of the world, to democratic values we hold dear, to freedom itself, we did what we always do: The United States stepped up. NATO stepped up. Our partners in Europe, in the—and then the Indo-Pacific stepped up. All across the world they stepped up.

And we're ready—we were ready because we stood together.

In the months leading up to the war, as Putin amassed his forces on the Ukrainian border and laid the groundwork for his brutal invasion, it was—I was in constant contact with my fellow leaders of the G-7 and the European Union and NATO, constantly.

We warned the world what Putin was planning. Even some in Ukraine didn't believe we were—what we had—our intelligence community found. We made sure NATO was prepared to deter any aggression against any member state. We pursued intense diplomacy with Russia, seeking to avert this terrible war. And when Russian bombs began to fall, we did not hesitate to act.

We rallied the world to support the brave people of Ukraine as they defend their liberty and their sovereignty with incredible dignity. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. Think about it. Think about what they're doing.

After nearly a year and a half of Russia's forces committing terrible atrocities, including crimes against humanity, the people of Ukraine remain unbroken. Unbroken. Ukraine remains independent. It remains free. And the United States has built a coalition of more than 50 nations to make sure Ukraine defends itself both now and is able to do it in the future as well.

Since this war began, I've stood with President Zelenskyy—as I just spent about an hour with him—both in Washington, in Kyiv, in Hiroshima, and now in Vilnius, to declare to the world what I say again: We will not waver. We will not waver. I mean that. Our commitment to Ukraine will not weaken. We will stand for liberty and freedom today, tomorrow, and for as long as it takes.

We all want this war to end on just terms, terms that uphold the basic principles of the United Nations Charter that we all signed up to: sovereignty, territorial integrity. These are two pillars of peaceful relations among nations. One country cannot be allowed to seize its neighbor's territory by force.

Russia could end this war tomorrow by withdrawing its forces from Ukraine, recognize these international borders, and ceasing its attacks on its—inhumane attacks on Russia—I mean, by Russia on Ukraine, against its children—women and children; its military.

Unfortunately, Russia has shown thus far no interest in a diplomatic outcome. Putin still wrongly believes that he can outlast Ukraine. He can't believe it's their land, their country, and their future.

And even after all this time, Putin still doubts our staying power. He's still making a bad bet that the conviction and the unity among the United States and our allies and partners will break down.

He still doesn't understand that our commitment to our values, our freedom is something he [we; White House correction] can never, never, ever, ever walk away from. It's who we are. I mean it: It's who we are. It's who we are.

Throughout this horrific war, the people of Lithuania, together with our Baltic brethren, have been among the fiercest—most fierce champions of Ukraine's right to a future of its own choosing: one that is free.

Because you lived so long with freedom denied, many of you who are older know better than anyone how precious the right to determine your own future is, precious to people everywhere—everywhere—not just in Ukraine, but Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, all the places around the world where people continue to fight to make their voices heard.

So my message—my message—to all of you tonight is: Keep it up. Keep it going. Keep reminding the world of hope that Lithuania embodies. And that's what you embody: hope in this country. *[Applause]* No, I really mean it. I'm not joking. I mean this sincerely.

We must never forget how much this matters and never, never give up on a better tomorrow. The defense of freedom is not the work of a day or a year. It's the calling of our lifetime, of all time.

We are steeled for the struggle ahead. Our unity will not falter. I promise you.

Folks, as I look around the world today, at a moment of war and peril, a moment of competition and uncertainty, I also see a moment of unprecedented opportunity—unprecedented opportunity—opportunity to make real strides toward a world of greater peace and greater prosperity, liberty and dignity, equal justice under the law, human rights and fundamental freedoms which are the blessing and birthright of all of humanity.

That—that—is the world the United States is working toward. And it's one we'll only reach if we do it together, and I mean together.

We need to take the same spirit of unity, common purpose, determination that we have demonstrated in our response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and bring more partners along as we continue working to build a world we want to live in and a world we want for our children.

My friends, at the most fundamental level, we face a choice—it's not hyperbole—we face a choice: a choice between a world defined by coercion and exploitation, where might makes right, or a world where we recognize that our own success is bound to the success of others.

When others do better, we do better as well; where we understand that the challenges we face today, from the existential threat of climate change to building a global economy where no one gets left behind, are too great for any one nation to solve on their own, and that to achieve our goals and meet the challenges of this age, we have to work together.

And I mean this sincerely: The world is changing. We have a chance to change the dynamic. That's why I've been so focused as President on rebuilding and revitalizing these alliances that are the cornerstone of American leadership in the world.

These past years, we have brought the transatlantic partnership to new heights, reaffirming the importance of the relationship between Europe and the United States as an anchor to global stability. The idea that the United States could prosper without a secure Europe is not reasonable. We've also elevated—[applause]—that's—it really isn't. Not a joke.

I sometimes—well—we also elevated and deepened America's alliance in the Indo-Pacific with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, and the Philippines, which provide critical security and deterrence in that vital region of the world.

Through our Quad partnership—it's a fancy way of saying our partnership with Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—we're bringing major democracies of the region together to cooperate, keeping the Indo-Pacific free and open, prosperous, and secure.

We've demonstrated during this NATO summit, with Indo-Pacific partners joining us for the second year in a row, we're working to deepen connections between the Atlantic and Pacific democracies so they can better work together toward the shared values we all seek: strong alliances, versatile partnerships, common purpose, collective action to meet our shared challenges.

The world has shrunk. That's how we build a future to see. But we share and know we share challenges and work together. We have to step up together, building the broadest and deepest coalition to strengthen and defend the basic rules of the road, to preserve all the extraordinary benefits that stem from the international system grounded in the rule of law.

We have to come together to protect the rights and freedoms; to underwrite the flow of ideas and commerce and—which have enabled decades of global growth. Yes, territorial integrity and sovereignty, but also principles like freedom of navigation and overflight, keeping our shared seas and skies open so that every nation has equal access to our global common space.

And as we continue to explore this age of new possibilities, an age enabled by rapid advances in innovation, we have to stand together to ensure that the common spaces of our future reflect our highest aspirations for ourselves and for others—as my dad would say, that everybody has—is treated with some dignity—so that artificial intelligence, engineering biology, and other engineering technologies—emerging technologies are not made into weapons of oppression, but rather they're used as tools of opportunity.

We're working with our allies and partners to build a supply chains that are more resilient, more secure, so we never again face a situation like we had during the pandemic where we couldn't get critical goods we needed for our daily lives.

You know, we all must summon the common will to actually address the existential threat of accelerating climate change. It's real. It's serious. And we don't have a lot of time. It is the—the—single greatest threat to humanity. And it's only by working together that we'll prevent the worst consequences of climate change from ravaging our future and that of our children and grandchildren.

We also have to recognize our shared responsibility to help unlock the enormous potential that exists in low- and middle-income companies [countries; White House correction] around the

world, not out of charity, but because it's in our own self-interest. We all benefit when more partners stand together, working toward shared goals. We all benefit when people are healthier and more prosperous. And that's not, again, hyperbole. It's true. We all benefit when more entrepreneurs and innovators are able to pursue their dreams for a better tomorrow.

You know, so we need to update our toolset to better address the needs of today in this interconnected world, a world where climate disasters, pandemics, conflicts spill over borders and make it harder to address the challenges of poverty and instability that hold so many people back.

That's why the United States is leading an effort to transform the multilateral development banks, like the World Bank, to help them better address the global challenges while enhancing their core mission of reducing poverty and boost shared prosperity.

We're all working together with our partners in the G-7 to address the enormous needs for high-standard infrastructure around the world, especially in low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. It's a statement about the world we want to build together.

Ladies and gentlemen, we stand at an inflection point, an inflection point in history, where the choices we make now are going to shape the direction of our world for decades to come. The world has changed.

Will we turn back naked, unchecked aggression today to deter other world—would-be aggressors tomorrow? Will we staunch the climate crisis before it's too late? Will we harness the new technologies to advance freedom, or will we diminish it? Will we advance opportunity in more places or allow instability and inequality to persist?

How we answer these essential questions is literally going to determine the kind of future our children and grandchildren have. And, again, that's not an exaggeration; that's a fact. It's going to take all of us. All of us.

I believe that with ambition, with confidence in ourselves and one another, with nations working together for common cause, we can answer these questions. We can ensure the vision we share and the freedoms we cherish are not just empty words in a troubled time, but a roadmap—and I mean this literally—a roadmap, a plan of urgent action toward a future we can reach, and we'll reach if we work together.

Folks, the road that lies before us is hard. It will challenge us, summon the best of ourselves to hold faith in one another and never give up, never lose hope. Never.

Every day, we have to make the choice. Every day, we must summon the strength to stand for what is right, to stand for what is true, to stand for freedom, to stand together.

And that, my friends, is the lesson we learn from history and the history of Lithuania's story. You know, it's the lesson we see demonstrated each day, and it will determine—it will determine—what the Ukraine looks like. And it is now—it's how we're going to work—how we rewrite the future of peace and hope, justice and light, liberty, possibilities for everyone—everyone, everywhere.

Folks, some have heard me say to my country many times: I have never, ever in my entire career been more optimistic about the prospects of the future. Never. Never.

So let me just say thank you for taking the time to be here to listen.

God bless you all, and may God protect the freedoms of the—the protectors of freedom in Ukraine, here, in every nation in the world, everywhere. God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:51 p.m. at Vilnius University. In his remarks, he referred to President Gitanas Nauseda of Lithuania; President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Vilnius, Lithuania.

Locations: Vilnius, Lithuania.

Names: Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Nauseda, Gitanas; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Zelenskyy, Volodymyr.

Subjects: Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies; Belarus, democracy efforts; Climate change; COVID–19 pandemic; European Union, relations with U.S.; Georgia, Republic of, democracy efforts; Global supply chain disruptions, efforts to address; Group of Seven (G–7) nations; Indo-Pacific, economic and security cooperation; Lithuania, President; Lithuania, President Biden's visit; Lithuania, relations with U.S.; Moldova, democracy efforts; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, international diplomatic efforts; Russia, President; Sweden, North Atlantic Treaty Organization accession bid; Turkey, President; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; Ukraine, international defense assistance; Ukraine, President; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; World Bank.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300621.