

The President's News Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam

September 10, 2023

The President. Good evening, everyone. It is evening, isn't it? [*Laughter*] This around-the-world in 5 days is interesting, isn't it?

Well, you know, there is that—one of my staff members said, "Remember the famous song, you know, 'Good Morning, Vietnam'?" Well, good evening, Vietnam. And good morning back in America.

Before we begin, I want to express my sadness by the loss of life and devastation caused by the earthquake in Morocco. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Morocco and my friend King Mohammed VII—VI, I should say.

And his administration—my administration—including Secretary of State Blinken, who is here with me today—is working with Moroccan officials on long distance here. We're working expeditiously to ensure American citizens in Morocco are safe, standing ready to provide any necessary assistance to the Moroccan people as well. We've made that offer.

Now, turning to the important visit here in Vietnam. As the General Secretary and I just shared earlier today, this trip has been a historic moment. Today, we can trace 50 years—a 50-year arc of progress in the relationship between our nations from conflict to normalization. This is a new elevated status that will be a force for prosperity and security in one of the most consequential regions in the world. We've elevated our cooperation directly to the Vietnamese's highest tier of partnership, referred to as the comprehensive strategic partnership. That means the United States has strengthened our ties with another critical Indo-Pacific partner.

Our progress today builds on the Camp David trilateral with Japan and the Republic of Korea and the United States; the comprehensive strategic partnership the United States launched with ASEAN last year; and the engagement with Pacific Islands—with the Pacific Islands Forum; our strengthened alliances with the Philippines; and AUKUS partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom; our elevated Quad engagement with India, Australia, and Japan; and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity; and all the effort we've advanced from day one of my administration to demonstrate to our Indo-Pacific partners and to the world the United States is a Pacific nation, and we're not going anywhere.

Now, let me also speak to a significant business we got done in the—in India during the G-20 summit. This was an important moment for the United States to demonstrate our global leadership and our commitment to solving the challenges that matter most to people around the world: investing in inclusive growth and sustainable development, addressing the climate crisis, strengthening food security and education, advancing global health and health security.

We showed up ready to work, and we showed the world the United States is a partner with a positive vision for our shared future. As a G-20, we—at the G-20, we made progress on issues like multilateral development bank reform to get to those nations that are neither poor nor wealthy, but were—couldn't qualify before; debt relief; and increased infrastructure needs not only in the Global South, but other parts of the world as well.

We forged a groundbreaking new partnership with—that will connect India to Europe with the Middle East and Israel, with transportation by rail and by shipment through—and energy supplies and digital connections that are going to open up untold opportunities for transformative economic investment through that—on that entire corridor.

We've also discussed Russia's brutal and illegal war in Ukraine. And there was sufficient agreement in the room on the need for just—for a just and lasting peace that upholds the principles of the U.N. Charter and respects sovereignty and territorial integrity.

I want to, once again, thank Prime Minister Modi for his leadership and his hospitality in hosting the G-20. He and I have had substantial discussions about how we're going to continue to strengthen the partnership between India and the United States, building on the Prime Minister's visit to the White House last June.

And, as I always do, I raised the important—of respecting human rights and the vital role that civil society and a free press have in building a strong and prosperous country with Mr. Modi.

And we're—have gotten a lot of important work done, and I'm looking forward to another good day tomorrow here in Vietnam.

And now, I will take your questions. Let me see. They told me—they gave me five people here.

Nandita of Reuters [Nadita Bose, Reuters].

China-U.S. Relations/Indo-Pacific Diplomatic Efforts/Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

Q. Hi. Thank you for taking my question, Mr. President.

The President. Oh, there you are. I couldn't—

Q. Hi.

The President. —see you. I'm sorry.

Q. Hi. Last week, China questioned the, quote, "sincerity" of the Biden administration.

The President. I'm sorry, the what?

Q. The sincerity.

The President. The sincerity of the Biden administration.

Q. Of the Biden administration. And accused the United States of containing China while pushing for diplomatic talks.

How would you respond to that? And do you think President Xi is being sincere about getting the relationship back on track as he bans Apple in China?

The President. Well, look, first of all, the—I am sincere about getting the relationship right. And one of the things that is going on now is, China is beginning to change some of the rules of the game, in terms of trade and other issues.

And so one of the things we talked about, for example, is that they're now talking about making sure that no Chinese—no one in the Chinese Government can use a Western cell phone. Those kinds of things.

And so, really, what this trip was about—it was less about containing China. I don't want to contain China. I just want to make sure that we have a relationship with China that is on the up and up, squared away, everybody knows what it's all about. And one of the ways you do that is, you make sure that we are talking about the same things.

And I think that one of the things we've done—I've tried to do, and I've talked with a number of my staff about this for the last, I guess, 6 months—is, we have an opportunity to strengthen alliances around the world to maintain stability.

That's what this trip was all about: having India cooperate much more with the United States, be closer with the United States, Vietnam being closer with the United States. It's not about containing China; it's about having a stable base, a stable base in the Indo-Pacific.

And it's—for example, when I was spending a lot of time talking with President Xi, he asked why we were doing—why was I going to have the Quad, meaning Australia, India, Japan, and the United States? And I said, "To maintain stability." It's not about isolating China. It's about making sure the rules of the road—everything from airspace and space in the ocean is—the international rules of the road are abided by.

And so—and I hope that—I think that Prime Minister Xi—I mean, Xi has some—some difficulties right now. All countries end up with difficulties, and he had some economic difficulties he's working his way through. I want to see China succeed economically, but I want to see them succeed by the rules.

The next question was to Bloomberg.

China/Taiwan/U.S. Export Controls

Q. Hi, Mr. President. Following up on your comments on China and the economy, you recently called China's economy a "ticking time bomb." Do you believe the country's slowdown could risk destabilizing the global economy or causing China to be more aggressive defensively, including with——

The President. Say the first part of your question again. Because there—this fan is going on, and it's loud here behind me.

Q. No worries. Do you believe the country's slowdown and growth could risk destabilizing the global economy or cause China to be more aggressive defensively, including with Taiwan?

And separately, sir, are you worried about the meeting between President Putin and Kim Jong Un, if that could mean Russia has more gains in the war in Ukraine?

The President. Look, I think China has a difficult economic problem right now for a whole range of reasons that relate to the international growth and lack thereof and the policies that China has followed.

And so I don't think it's going to cause China to invade Taiwan. And matter of fact, the opposite: It probably doesn't have the same capacity that it had before.

But as I said, I'm not—we're not looking to hurt China, sincerely. We're all better off if China does well, if China does well by the international rules. It grows the economy.

But they have had some real difficulty in terms of their economy of late, particularly in real estate. Aside—that end of their bargain. And I think the actions that they're going to have to take are ones that are—they're in the process of deciding right now. And I'm not going to predict what way it will come out. But we're not looking to decouple from China.

What I'm not going to do is, I'm not going to sell China material that would enhance their capacity to make more nuclear weapons, to engage in defense activities that are contrary to what is viewed as most people would think was a positive development in the region.

And—but we're not trying to hurt China.

Okay. Let's—BBC. Laura. Am I correct? Is that correct—Laura?

President Xi Jinping of China/Global Trade Infrastructure/Africa

Q. It is. My name is Laura Bicker. I'm from BBC News. Good evening, Mr. President.

The President. Good evening.

Q. How are you?

The President. Well. Thank you.

Q. Good.

The President. These 5-day trips around the world are no problem.

Q. I can imagine. It is evening, I'd like to remind you. [*Laughter*]

I mean, in the last 6 months, you've signed pacts and deals with Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Australia, and even the Pacific Islands. You're here, standing in Beijing's backyard. Now, China says this is part of your cold war mentality. Are they right, sir? Are they right, Mr. President? Is it a danger of a cold war? And when will you meet Mr. Xi?

The President. Well, I hope I get to see Mr. Xi sooner than later. I've spent more time with him than any other world leader has, sum total, over the last 12 years. So I hope we get to see him again soon.

But no, look—for example, one of the things we did in India: We provided for a new path that's going to save everybody money, increase the Third World—"the Third World"—the Global South's capacity to grow by sending—we're going to—from—we're going to have a new railroad from India all the way across to the Mediterranean, new shipping lanes and pipelines across the Mediterranean through Europe, up into Great Britain and beyond.

That's all about economic growth. That has nothing to do with hurting China or helping China. It has to do with dealing with everything from climate change to making sure that these countries can succeed economically and grow.

Look, my thesis has been, from the beginning, both domestically and in terms of foreign policy: Invest in your people. Invest in the people. Give them a chance.

Everything is better off when people—I know it's going to sound trite. If everybody in the world had a job they get up in the morning and wanted to go to and thought they—and they could put three squares in the table for their family, no matter where they live, the whole world be better off. We'd be a lot better. That's the notion here behind this.

For example, you know, one of the things we're doing in terms of—I proposed a long time ago at the G-7, now it's—that's going to come to fruition at the G-20, is making sure that we build a railroad all the way across the African Continent. Think about it. There is no way to cross the African Continent by road—by rail. And there's not even a direct highway across.

Now, let's assume for the sake of discussion—when we talk about food shortages—assume there was one country in that vast continent that had a—an excess of foodstuffs and resources. How would they get it to where they're going to go? How are they going to do it?

That's why we're also going to invest billions of dollars in solar facilities in Angola to have the largest—the largest solar facility in the world—among the largest. That helps Angola, but it also helps the whole region.

So I think we think too much in terms of cold war terms. It's not about that. It's about generating economic growth and stability in all parts of the world. And that's what we're trying to do.

Sorry. Okay. Am I pronouncing it—Auvelia [Aurelia; White House correction]? Did I pronounce the name correctly? There you are.

Climate Change/Forest Conservation Efforts/Clean Energy Transition Assistance/India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

Q. Yes. Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

Q. It's Aurelia End for AFP. I had a question on the climate crisis. You just mentioned the G-20. Just this week, the United States warned that if there is no phasing out of fossil fuels, it won't be possible to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement. There was no agreement at the G-20 on fossil fuels. How concerned are you about this lack of consensus?

The President. It wasn't so much an agreement that we would try to meet the goals at the G-20. The United States is going to meet those goals, by the way. We're going to exceed those goals. A lot of other countries are as well.

But we want to give those countries that don't have the economic wherewithal and did not cause the problem in the first place—for example, I met with Lula in Brazil.

I started off way back in the eighties with a really fine Republican Senator named Dick Lugar. We said: "Here's what we're going to do. If you owe us money, we're going to forgive your debt if you maintain your forest." Because they become carbon sinks. They're the things that take carbon out of the air.

And so we're talking to what we should be going—and the countries that cleared their land and put cattle on there and farming and did all the things that—and increased development, they, in fact, are the ones—the reasons why—the main reason why we've gotten as far down the road to disaster here as we have.

And so it seems—and if we have the economic capacity, we—those nations should be getting together and providing help for the nations that don't have the wherewithal to do it, the economic wherewithal and the infrastructure wherewithal.

And that's why, for example, I mentioned—in the interest of time, I'll just mention Angola again. Angola has the capacity to generate megawatts of energy through solar energy. They don't have the economic means to do that. Isn't it in the interest of the whole world if they are, in fact, able to generate significant capacity to absorb—to prevent carbon from being released in the air? I think that it is.

So what we're trying to do is help those nations. The—and particularly in the Global South, where they're not as wealthy, where there are not as many opportunities to be able to deal with the things that they want to deal with.

For example—and I'll end with this—there is more carbon absorbed from the atmosphere on a daily basis—and I'll look to my—my friend, John Kerry, who'd forgotten more about this than most people know—correct me if I get this wrong, John, but I'm quite sure I'm right—and that is that there's more carbon observed [absorbed; White House correction] from the air into the Amazon region into the ground—the ground—than emitted in the entire United States on the same basis.

Now, imagine if people go in and do what we did 150, 200, 250 years ago and cut down the forest and the—start farming in that area, no longer have that great carbon sink. We—you know, it's going—it would be a gigantic problem.

So we should be going to areas, whether it's in the Congo or other places, as the G-7 nations and as the wealthy G-20 nations, the—and providing the kind of infrastructure they need to be able to benefit.

And guess what? In addition to helping the environment overall—and the only existential threat humanity faces even more frightening than a nuclear war is global warming going above 1.5 degrees in the next 20—10 years. We're—that'd be real trouble. There's no way back from that.

And so there's a lot we can do in the meantime. For example, that pipeline—that railroad we're talking about going across from the middle—from India, throughout the Middle East, and to—across the Mediterranean and all through Europe, that's going to have a hydrogen pipeline there. This is going to significantly reduce the amount of carbon emitted in the air, but it costs a lot of money to put that down. And the world is going to say it's in our interest—collective interest to do it.

So I have not—I have not given up at all on the notion that we're going to be able to, you know—how can I say it? I think we can triple the renewable capacity for—as it relates to global warming—by the year 2030—2030.

Countries following the IRA playbook, which is the one we passed—the clean energy jobs, they're going to create manufacturing jobs.

For example, as a consequence of what we've done, we have the most—we have the most—we have the strongest economy in the world today. Right now, today, the United States of America has the strongest economy in the world—in the world. Now, we've got more to do, but we have the strongest economy in the world.

And one of the reasons we're doing it—we changed the mechanism of how we deal with this. And that is instead of trickle-down economy—that is if the wealthy and the corporations do very well, everybody is going to do well.

Well, the truth of the matter is, I've never bought that theory. But I think the times have changed, and a lot of leading economists are beginning to agree with me—just flat, straight-out academic economists—and that is: We should build economic growth from the middle out and the bottom up.

When that happens, everybody does well. Everybody does well. The wealthy still do very, very well. They have no problem. You can still be a billionaire under that system as well. But you're going to start paying your taxes if I have anything to do it. That's a different issue.

But all kidding aside—so there's—we have—I think the other thing that's dawning on people—many of you who are foreign policy experts have been engaged for a long time. Did you ever think you'd be sitting at a G-20 conference where everyone was preoccupied with the notion of global warming? Not a joke. Did you ever think that?

And there's a—my brother loves having—there's famous lines from movies that he always quotes. You know, it's—and one of them is—there's a movie about John Wayne. He's an Indian scout. And they're trying to get the—I think it was the Apache—one of the great tribes of America back on the reservation.

And he's standing with a Union soldier—so he's—they're all on their—and they're on their horses in their saddles. And there's three or four Indians in headdresses, and the Union soldiers—and the Union soldiers are basically saying to the Indians: "Come with me, we'll take care of you. We'll—everything will be good." And the Indian scout—the Indian looks at John Wayne and points to the Union soldier and says, "He's a lying, dog-faced pony soldier."

Well, there's a lot of lying, dog-faced pony soldiers out there about global warming, but not anymore. All of a sudden, they're all realizing it's a problem. And there's nothing like seeing the light.

For—and let's see. I'm just following my orders here.

Staff, is there anybody I haven't spoken to?

[At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.]

The President. No, I ain't calling on you. I'm calling on—I said there were five questions.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. Anita—Anita from VOA.

The President. Anita [Anita Powell, Voice of America] from VOA.

Russia/China-U.S. Relations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I hope you didn't think that calling only on woman would get you softballs tonight. *[Laughter]*

The President. Oh, I know better than that.

Q. Okay. Well, let me start with President Xi——

The President. If you send me a softball, I wouldn't know what to do with it. I'd probably strike out even worse.

Q. Well, let me ask you about—you've spent lots of time talking about all the time you spent with President Xi and the importance of leader-to-leader communication, yet you two haven't spoken in 10 months. And I just wonder, are you worried that this is destabilizing the U.S.-China relationship? And what are you going to do about it?

And then, if I may, on Ukraine, sir. Kyiv is upset—*[laughter]*—is upset that the G-20 communique didn't name Russia as the aggressor. Have you managed to rally more support or sympathy across the G-20, or is this emerging as a wedge issue with the Global South? And does that change your commitment to Ukraine?

The President. It's not a wedge issue of the Global South. It's a wedge issue with Russia, which was present, and with China, which was present—which was—had the representation.

And so—and by the way, I am a—my team, my staff still meets with President Xi's people and his Cabinet, in effect; I met with his number-two person here in—excuse me, in India today.

So it's not like there's a crisis if I don't personally speak to him. It would be better if I did, but I think—look, this is not a criticism; it's an observation: He has his hands full right now. He has overwhelming unemployment with his youth. One of the major economic tenets of his plan isn't working at all right now. I'm not happy for that. But it's not working.

So he's trying to figure out, I suspect—I don't know—just like I would, trying to figure out what to do about the particular crisis they're having now.

But I don't think it's a crisis relating to conflict between China and the United States. As a matter of fact, I think it's less likely to cause that kind of conflict. I don't—anyway, I just think that there are other things on leaders' minds, and they respond to what's needed at the time.

And look, nobody likes having celebrated international meetings if you don't know what you want at the meeting, if you don't have a game plan. He may have a game plan; he just hasn't shared it with me.

But I tell you what, I don't know about you, but I'm going to go to bed.

State Council Premier Li Keqiang of China

Q. What did you talk about with Mr. Li? You said you spoke to the number two from China, who was—in India today?

The President. Yes, we talked——

Q. What did you talk about with him?

The President. We talked about what we talked about at the conference overall. We talked about stability. We talked about making sure that the Third World—the—excuse me—"Third World"—the Southern Hemisphere had access to change, it had access—we—it wasn't confrontational at all. He came up to me. He said—[*inaudible*].

Press Secretary Jean-Pierre. Thank—thank you, everybody.

The President. Thank——

Press Secretary Jean-Pierre. This ends the press conference. Thanks, everyone.

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

Q. Mr. President, are you putting U.S. strategic interests above human rights here in Vietnam?

Q. You have time for one more. We came all this way. We came all this way.

Human Rights Issues

Q. Are you putting U.S. strategic interests above human rights here in Vietnam?

The President. [*Inaudible*]*—above human rights, and I've raised it with every person I met with.*

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Are you worried about your son being indicted, Mr. President?

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 9:09 p.m. at the JW Marriott Hotel Hanoi. In his remarks, the President referred to General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng of Vietnam; President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil; and Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John F. Kerry. A reporter referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and President of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : News conferences, September 10.

Locations: Hanoi, Vietnam.

Names: Blinken, Antony J.; Jean-Pierre, Karine; Kerry, John F.; Li Keqiang; Lula da Silva, Luiz Inácio; Modi, Narendra; Mohammed VI, King; Trọng, Nguyễn Phú; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Africa, regional infrastructure development; Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); AUKUS trilateral security partnership; Brazil, President; Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; China, political status of Taiwan; China, President; China, relations with U.S.; China, State Council Premier; Civil and human rights, U.S. promotion efforts; Clean energy transition in developing countries, international assistance; Climate change; Economic improvement; Forests, wetlands, and grasslands, conservation efforts; Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; India, Prime Minister; India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity; Indo-Pacific, economic and security cooperation; Infrastructure development, international assistance for developing countries; Japan, relations with U.S.; Morocco, earthquake damage and recovery efforts; Morocco, King; Morocco, U.S. assistance; News media,

Presidential interviews; Pacific Islands Forum; Philippines, relations with U.S.; Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Renewable energy sources and technologies; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Secretary of State; South Korea, relations with U.S.; Special Presidential Envoy on Climate; Taiwan, political status with respect to China; Tax Code reform; U.S. export controls, strengthening efforts; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vietnam, General Secretary; Vietnam, President Biden's visit; Vietnam, relations with U.S.; White House Press Secretary.

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