

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on the Reported Death of Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny and an Exchange With Reporters

February 16, 2024

The President. Well, good afternoon.

I'm heading off to East Palestine in a moment, but I wanted to say a few things this morning about Alexei Navalny.

You know, like millions of people around the world, I am literally both not surprised and outraged by the news, the reported death of Alexei Navalny.

He bravely stood up to the corruption, the violence, and the—all the—all the bad things that the Putin government was doing.

In response, Putin had him poisoned. He had him arrested. He had him prosecuted for fabricated crimes. He sentenced him to prison. He was held in isolation. Even all that didn't stop him from calling out Putin's lies. Even in prison, he was a powerful voice of the truth, which is kind of amazing when you think about it.

And he could have lived safely in exile after the assassination attempt on him in 2020—which nearly killed him, I might add. And—but he was traveling outside the country at the time. Instead, he returned to Russia. He returned to Russia knowing he'd likely be imprisoned or even killed if he continued his work. But he did it anyway, because he believed so deeply in his country—in Russia.

Reports of his death, if they're true—and I have no reason to believe they're not—Russian authorities are going to tell their own story. But make no mistake—make no mistake—Putin is responsible for Navalny's death. Putin is responsible.

What has happened to Navalny is yet more proof of Putin's brutality. No one should be fooled—not in Russia, not at home, not anywhere in the world. Putin does not only target his [the; White House correction] citizens of other countries, as we've seen what's going on in Ukraine right now, he also inflicts terrible crimes on his own people.

And as people across Russia and around the world are mourning Navalny today because he was so many things that Putin was not: He was brave. He was principled. He was dedicated to building a Russia where the rule of law existed and of—where it applied to everybody. Navalny believed in that Russia—that Russia. He knew it was a cause worth fighting for and, obviously, even dying for.

This tragedy reminds us of the stakes of this moment. We have to provide the funding so Ukraine can keep defending itself against Putin's vicious onslaughts and war crimes. You know, there was a bipartisan Senate vote that passed overwhelmingly in the United States Senate to fund Ukraine.

Now, as I've said before, and I mean this in the literal sense: History is watching. History is watching the House of Representatives. The failure to support Ukraine at this critical moment will never be forgotten. It's going to go down in the pages of history. It really is. It's consequential.

And the clock is ticking. And this has to happen. We have to help now. You know, we have to realize what we're dealing with with Putin.

All of us should reject the dangerous statements made by the previous President that invited Russia to invade our NATO allies if they weren't paying up. He said if an ally did not pay their dues, he'd encourage Russia to, quote, "do whatever the hell they want."

Let me—I guess I should clear my mind here a little bit and not say what I'm really thinking. But let me be clear: This is an outrageous thing for a President to say. I can't fathom. I can't fathom. From Truman on, they're rolling over in their graves hearing this.

As long as I'm President, America stands by our sacred commitment to our NATO allies as they have stood by their commitments to us repeatedly.

Putin and the whole world should know: If any adversary were to attack us, our NATO allies would back us. And if Putin were to attack a NATO ally, the United States will defend every inch of NATO territory. Now is the time for even greater unity among our NATO allies to stand up to the threat that Putin's Russia poses.

You know, I send my deepest condolences to Alexei's staff and supporters who are going to continue his work despite this loss, despite all of Putin's desperate attempts to stamp out the opposition.

And most of all, to his family, especially to his wife, his daughter, and his son, who have already sacrificed so much for their family and a shared dream for a better future for Russia.

So I just want to say God bless Alexei Navalny. His courage will not be forgotten. And I'm sure it will not be the only courage we see coming out of Russia in the near term.

Thank you. I'll be happy to take a couple questions.

Circumstances of the Reported Death of Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny

Q. Sir, first, was this an assassination?

The President. The answer is, I—we don't know exactly what happened, but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did.

Russia/Ukraine/U.S. and International Sanctions Against Russia

Q. And to be clear, you warned Vladimir Putin when you were in Geneva of "devastating" consequences if Navalny died in Russian custody. What consequences should he and Russia face?

The President. That was 3 years ago. In the meantime, they faced a hell of a lot of consequences. They've lost and/or had wounded over 350,000 Russian soldiers. They've made it into a position where they've been subjected to great sanctions across the board. And we're contemplating what else could be done.

But the—what we were talking about at the time: There were no actions being taken against Russia. And that—look at all that's transpired since then.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Q. Can you say whether you're——

Q. How do you think this——

Q. ——whether you're looking at increasing sanctions on Russia right now?

The President. We're looking at a whole number of options. That's all I'll say right now.

U.S. Assistance to Ukraine

Q. Is there anything you can do to get ammunition to the Ukrainians without the supplemental from Congress?

The President. No, but it's about time they step up—don't you think?—instead of going on a 2-week vacation. Two weeks they're walking away. Two weeks. What are they thinking? My God, this is bizarre.

And it's just reinforcing all the concern and—almost—I won't say "panic," but real concern about the United States being a reliable ally. This is outrageous.

U.S. Assistance to Ukraine

Q. Are you more confident now that you'll get the Ukraine aid given what's happened today?

The President. Well, I hope to God it helps. But I mean, the idea we need anything more to get the Ukraine aid—I mean, just—this is—in light of a former President's statement that—saying Russia, if—they haven't paid their dues to us, go get them.

Come on. What are these guys doing? What are they doing?

Russian Technological Capabilities in Space

Q. Sir, how concerned are you about the antisatellite capability that Russia is developing? And what is your administration planning to do in response?

The President. First of all, there is no nuclear threat to the people of America or anywhere else in the world with what Russia is doing at the moment. Number one.

Number two, anything that they're doing and/or they will do relates to satellites and space and damaging those satellites, potentially.

Number three, I—there is no evidence that they have made a decision to go forward with doing anything in space either. So what we found out: There was a capacity to launch a system into space that could theoretically do something that was damaging. Hasn't happened yet. And my expectation—I—my hope is, it will not.

Q. Mr. President, just quickly——

White House staffer. Thank you all. Thank you, pool.

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

Q. Quickly, Mr. President, have——

The President. I'll—take one more.

Situation in Gaza, Palestinian Territories/Israeli Military Operations/Hostages Held by Hamas

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Switching gears for a moment. Have the Israelis presented a credible evacuation plan for the nearly 1.5 million displaced Palestinians sheltering in Rafah? And what would the consequences be for Israel if they move ahead with a full-scale ground invasion without clear measures to protect civilians there?

The President. Well, first of all, I've had extensive conversations with the Prime Minister of Israel over the last several days, almost an hour each. And I've made the case—and I feel very strongly about it—that there has to be a temporary cease-fire to get the prisoners out, to get the hostages out. And that is underway. I'm still hopeful that that can be done.

And in the meantime, I don't anticipate—I'm hoping that that you—that the Israelis will not make any massive land invasion in the meantime. So it's my expectation that's not going to happen.

There has to be a cease-fire temporarily to get those hostages—and by the way, there are—we're in a situation where there are American hostages, American citizens that are being held hostage. It's not just—not just Israelis; it's American hostages as well.

And you know, my hope and expectation is that we'll get this hostage deal. We'll bring the Americans home. And the deal is being negotiated now, and we're going to see where it takes us.

[Several reporters began speaking at once.]

House of Representatives Impeachment Inquiry Into the President's Finances

Q. An FBI—an FBI informant—an FBI informant at the center of the impeachment inquiry into you has been indicted for allegedly lying. Your reaction to that, and should the inquiry be dropped?

The President. He is lying, and it should be dropped. And it's just been a—it's been an outrageous effort from the beginning. What he did——

[Several reporters began speaking at once.]

The President. No, I'm serious.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

The President. Thank you. Thank you, all.

See you in Ohio.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:37 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; former President Donald J. Trump; Yulia Borisovna Navalnaya, wife of Mr. Navalny, and their daughter Daria and son Zakhar; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Alexander Smirnov, a former confidential human source for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He also referred to H.R. 815.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, reported death; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

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