

On-the-Record Press Call by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on the President's Trip to Europe

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Briefing Room

• Press Briefings

Via Teleconference

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MS. HORNE: Thank you, Operator. Hi, everyone, and thanks for joining us on short notice. Today's call will be on the record, and our speaker will be National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

Jake, I'll turn it over to you for some opening comments, and then we're happy to take your questions.

MR. SULLIVAN: Thanks, Emily. And thanks, everyone, for joining. The main purpose here is to get the opportunity to answer some questions. But before we get to that, I thought I would just take a couple of minutes to review, from our perspective, the outcomes of this trip and where we go from here.

The bottom line is that Joe Biden confidently and skillfully donned the mantle of leader of the free world on this trip. The previous president had ceded that mantle, and this president has now emphatically reclaimed it. And as the foundational outcome for the trip, I think that is the most significant.

But it goes way beyond that. This was an unusually productive, substantive set of summits with real, tangible outcomes. And the combined impact of those has laid the groundwork for proving out the case that democracies can deliver for their own people and for people around the world, as the President discussed on multiple of his stops during the trip.

I'll just say a word about five significant areas of progress on this trip. The first is action on COVID. The President both made a historic and monumental commitment of 500 million — half a billion — Pfizer vaccines that the U.S. will provide to the 100 lowest-income countries around the world. And this also galvanized commitments from the other G7 members, as well as helped form the core of a broader action plan to end the pandemic before the end of 2022, which we will now move forward smartly to execute on, both in terms of securing the production of the pledged doses, distributing them effectively, and dealing with all the other aspects of support that are required to end this pandemic.

The second is convergence among likeminded countries, among the world's democracies, on China. We have — the G7 — embraced a new infrastructure initiative, Build Back Better World — B3W — that will be a high-standards, transparent, climate-friendly alternative to the Belt Road Initiative.

We had NATO tackling China in its communiqué for the first time, truly taking the security challenge posed by China seriously, and also a tasking for a new strategic concept that would deal with China where the last Strategic Concept did not even mention China.

We have the U.S.-EU Trade Technology Council launched, which will address a wide range of trade and technology issues, both in terms of the affirmative agenda between the U.S. and Europe, and also taking on, in a coordinated fashion, the non-market economic practices that China has pursued over many years to the detriment of market economies in both Europe and the United States.

And, in fact, the G7 spoke to this issue of coordination and alignment on standing up to countering and pushing back on China's non-market economic practices as part of a broader economic competition.

A specific, tangible example of that on this trip was the agreement to end a 16-year-long dispute between Airbus and Boeing. And that dispute — and that agreement involved not just a five-year suspension of tariffs but, critically, explicit alignment on the U.S. and the EU working together on inbound and outbound investment related to China's large aircraft — large passenger aircraft industry so that the U.S. and the EU will be working together to protect jobs and protect technology in Europe and the United States against China's predatory practices.

The third major area of progress was delivering for workers and families, and this Airbus-Boeing deal, I think, is a significant example of that because, in the end, it will help secure and grow jobs in our own aviation industry by relaxing the tariffs and by protecting against predatory competition from China.

And, of course, the G7 agreement on global minimum tax will, once implemented, provide hundreds of billions of dollars over time into the U.S. FISC that can be invested in American workers and communities that currently are being lost because of the race to the bottom on corporate taxation.

The fourth area of progress was President Biden and the United States standing up for our values in an emphatic, affirmative, and positive way alongside and in chorus with our allies and partners. This included, of course, the Atlantic Charter — the new Atlantic Charter that the U.S. and the UK — Prime Minister Johnson and President Biden — signed in the opening phase of the trip. It included the G7 speaking out with one collective voice on human rights abuses in Xinjiang, as well as making a series of commitments on forced labor, particularly in those sectors that are prevalent in Xinjiang.

It included Joe Biden directly challenging Putin on a range of human-rights-related issues, including the unjust detention of Aleksey Navalny, the effort to suppress Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, and then his extensive public comments yesterday about how

an American president has to stand up and speak out on human rights and democracy; that it is stamped in America's DNA. And that put, I think, an exclamation point on an entire trip centered around placing values back at the core of America's foreign policy.

And then the fifth area was driving progress on cyber. From the G7 commitments around ransomware, to NATO adopting a new cyber defense policy for the first time in seven years, to the extensive conversations as part of the summit yesterday between President Biden and President Putin on critical infrastructure in particular, we feel like we have emerged from this trip with a common strategy with our allies, and as well as having laid down some clear markers with Russia, some clear expectations, and also communicated to them the capacities that we have should they choose not to take action against criminals who are attacking our critical infrastructure from Russian soil.

Cyber also relates to this broader effort at standing up a strategic stability dialogue that will address arms control, but also touch on issues related to both cyber and space as we move forward.

Of course, there were other critical elements to this trip — from the work that President Biden did with President Macron of France to come to an agreement around increased funding for NATO for new capabilities between now and 2030; to his meeting with President Erdoğan of Turkey on enduring presence in Afghanistan and how we ensure the security of that presence; to his meeting with President Ramaphosa of South Africa on how the United States can support vaccine manufacturing on the African continent; and much more.

But those five areas in particular, I think, are where we feel like we made meaningful progress and have set ourselves up from a position of strength to be able to deal both with the transnational challenges of our time and with competition with China and Russia on a going-forward basis.

So I said I wanted to get to your questions. I took a little time there — probably longer than I should have. But thank you for a hearing the add on all of that.

Q Thank you. Hi, Jake. I wanted to ask about the NATO discussions on the Afghanistan withdrawal and the President's meeting with President Erdoğan. Turkey has offered to secure and operate the international airport provided it receives what its defense minister called political, financial, and logistical support.

As you also know, the Taliban has issued a statement saying it will consider any remaining foreign troops, including Turkey's, to be occupying forces and will treat them accordingly.

I wanted to ask how seriously you take the Taliban threat. And did the President have any sense of what exactly Turkey would need to fulfill this task? And what is the United States and other partners willing to give in terms of support?

And secondarily, a separate question on the bilat with Turkey: There didn't seem to be any give in Turkey's position on the S-400. What does that mean in terms of Turkey's continuing participation in NATO? Is everybody just going to coexist with Turkey

operating this system? Thanks.

MR. SULLIVAN: Thanks, Karen. So, on your first question, President Biden and President Erdoğan had a detailed discussion of a potential Turkish mission to secure the airport once the Resolute Support Mission has ended. The President and President Erdoğan agreed that they would work together to make this happen.

President Erdoğan indicated he would need, as you said, certain forms of support to do that. And President Biden committed that that support would be forthcoming. President Erdoğan expressed satisfaction with that, and the two of them tasked their teams just to work out the final details.

But the clear commitment from the leaders was established that Turkey would play a lead role in securing Hamid Karzai International Airport, and we are now working through how to execute against that.

Obviously, we take seriously the concern that the Taliban or other elements in Afghanistan will attack the Western — or the international presence — diplomatic presence or security presence in and around Kabul. That's why we are putting together a detailed and effective security plan.

We do not believe that what the Taliban has said publicly

should or will deter the efforts underway right now to establish that security presence, which in turn will enable international missions — diplomatic missions to operate.

On the S-400, they discussed it. There was not a resolution of the issue. There was a commitment to continue the dialogue on the S-400. And the two teams will be following up on that coming out of the meeting.

Q Actually, Karen asked my question. But I just wondered if, Jake, you could elaborate a little bit on what plan B is if the Turks decide that it's not going to be in their interest or — to provide the security there in the end, and how confident you are that that plan can go forward. What's plan B, though, if it doesn't?

MR. SULLIVAN: Sure. We are feeling good about where we are in terms of the planning with the Turks on this issue. But, of course, we are obviously also conducting contingency planning in the event that either Turkey can't proceed — although we have every expectation they will — or can only proceed in a more limited fashion.

And without going into too much detail at this point because of the sensitivity of that contingency planning, I will say that it focuses on security contractors who have extensive experience in both static and dynamic security in Afghanistan. And that is what we are looking at as the alternative.

We have scoped out what would be necessary to be able to confidently secure the airport in Kabul. And we feel that we would have an alternative, although we are very much focused right now on converting the President's commitments to each other — President

Erdoğan and President Biden — into an action plan that sees the Turks taking the lead at HKIA.

Q Hi, Jake. Thanks for taking this call. I was wondering, since you mentioned the G7 countries aligning on China, if you can elaborate a little bit more if that sort of means now that you had the G7 meeting, aligning, clearing the decks, meeting with Putin, if that now means you can go on to a bilateral discussion with President Xi and how you're taking that on.

And if you could comment on, specifically, the human rights portion of that: What concretely will the G7 — the other G7 countries do on forced labor supply chain issues, since you guys were the first one to take action?

MR. SULLIVAN: Yeah, thank you. So, on the first question, the answer is that what the President said about there being no substitute for leader-level dialogue as a central part of why he held the summit with Putin yesterday also applies to China and to President Xi Jinping. He will look for opportunities to engage with President Xi going forward.

We don't have any particular plans at the moment, but I would note that both leaders are likely to be at the G20 in Italy in October. So I will leave it at that for now, because I — you know, we're not coming off of this trip — the last thing we're doing on Thursday is planning the next thing.

But soon enough, we will sit down to work out the right modality for the two presidents to engage. Now, it could be a phone call; it could be a meeting on the margins of an international — another international summit; it could be something else.

So, no decisions have been made on that score. But the notion that President Biden will engage in the coming month with President Xi in some way to take stock of where we are in the relationship and to ensure that we have that kind of direct communication that we found valuable with President Putin yesterday, we're very much committed to that. It's now just a question of when and how. And we will work through that and have more to report.

On forced labor, what we — you know, the G7 identified three sectors in particular: the garment sector; the agriculture sector, with cotton being one of the aspects of agriculture we're particularly focused on; and the polysilicon sector and solar sector.

So, what we expect is that other G7 partners will look at various forms of restrictions on goods that are proven to be produced with forced labor. The precise form of those restrictions will vary country by country; the timing on them will vary country by country. But our expectation is that we will align in a broad approach to take tangible action against or related to the supply chains emerging from forced labor jurisdiction.

Q Hi there, Jake. Thanks so much for doing this. I had a couple of questions just about, kind of, some of the more practical results of the Putin-Biden summit. I know that there was discussion of sending ambassadors back. Can you expand on that? Are there, sort of,

any talks of having the United States continue to hire local staff in Moscow? Any interest in reopening consulates?

And then a somewhat, I guess, not exactly related question: But there's talk about the UN voting and whether or not to keep the last remaining aid route into Syria open. And I'm curious if there were discussions on Syria. Did you all get any conversations about whether or not — just essentially where Russia would vote on that particular issue?

MR. SULLIVAN: Sure, thank you. So, first, the two presidents agreed that they would return their ambassadors to capitals. So, Ambassador Sullivan will go back to Moscow; Ambassador Antonov will come back to Washington. And this is an effort to regularize the diplomatic engagement following the steps that the United States took in response to various harmful actions by Russia earlier this year. So, that has happened. That's point one.

Point two, on the question of locally employed staff in Russia, the two presidents did discuss it. President Biden made the point that we each need effectively functioning diplomatic missions in our respective capitals in order to manage this relationship, both the difficulties in the relationship and the areas where we can make practical progress.

And in that regard, he encouraged President Putin to be practical and flexible about the implementation of Russian regulations on locally employed staff. And President Putin indicated that he would take measures to ensure that our mission was properly staffed, whether it's through some — through the provision of visas for Americans to be able to fill those roles or through some other adjustment and regulations within Russia.

So, the next step on that is that our teams will meet to follow up to try to work out details so that our mission in Moscow, in particular, but also throughout the rest of Russia, is not hamstrung. And President Putin was forward-leaning in that regard, and we will see how that translates into actual decisions here and in the weeks ahead.

On the question — now I'm forgetting what the other — oh, Syria.

Q On Syria, yes.

MR. SULLIVAN. Yeah, on Syria. So, they did have a discussion on Syria, and in particular, focused on the question of humanitarian access. President Biden made the point that you've got millions of hungry people, people in need, in northeast and northwest Syria. And having those humanitarian crossings administered by the United Nations, particularly the one that is currently open and slated for renewal in July, is vital to ensuring that aid gets to the people who need it.

President Putin did not make a commitment as to how the Russians were going to vote on the resolution at the United Nations in July, but it was a constructive conversation. And we believe that there is scope for the U.S. and Russia to work together on a positive outcome so that resolution gets passed, that crossing gets sustained, and that other measures to alleviate the suffering of the people of Syria are also adopted with the U.S. and Russia working together on that issue.

Q Hey, Jake. Thanks so much for doing this. The President said yesterday that we'll find out within the next six months to a year whether or not there is actually a strategic dialogue that matters with Russia. How will you measure progress towards improving U.S.-Russia relations in the coming months? And if you don't see that progress, what is the alternative?

And then a quick question as well on the comments that Congressman Kevin McCarthy made: He said that he believes the President should have used this summit to "stand up for our national interests." And he says, "Unfortunately, President Biden gave Vladimir Putin a pass." I'm wondering if you have a response to that? Thanks.

MR. SULLIVAN: So, on Representative McCarthy's comments, I think they are — his assertion is belied by the voluminous evidence that President Biden challenged President Putin on a range of issues that the previous President, who Representative McCarthy supported strongly, gave President Putin a pass on.

He challenged him on Aleksey Navalny. He challenged him on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He challenged him on the detained Americans — unjustly detained Americans in Russia. He challenged him on Russia's harmful cyber activities. He challenged him on election interference.

He didn't side with Putin against the intelligence community on that — quite the contrary. And in a number of other areas, President Biden was clear, direct, straightforward in explaining to President Putin what American expectations are, what American capabilities are.

And he indicated that there are areas where we can work together, but he also was direct in saying if Russia chooses to continue various harmful activities, harmful to the national interests of the United States, the United States would take action, would respond.

So, you heard that publicly from him yesterday, where he was clear and direct in where he was standing up and pushing back against Putin. And what you heard publicly was very much a reflection of what President Biden conveyed privately over the course of the summit. So, that's on your second question.

On your first question: There are, I think, three or four different areas where we will be able to see, in the months ahead, whether progress is possible or whether we will simply have to take action to safeguard our interests because progress hasn't occurred.

One of those areas is in the cyber domain and, in particular, on critical infrastructure. And President Biden passed a list of the 16 sectors of critical infrastructure that are enshrined in Presidential Policy Directive 21, and indicated that he was particularly focused on those sectors, in terms of Russia both refraining from state-related cyber disruptions and preventing cyber disruptions by criminals operating from Russian soil. So, that's one.

Two, whether we actually are seeing tangible progress in the strategic stability dialogue around arms control and risk reduction measures.

Three, whether we are seeing progress on regional issues, from Afghanistan to Syria to Iran.

And then, four — going back to a previous question — whether or not practical steps are being taken to ensure that each of our embassies can operate in a unencumbered, effective way so that we can manage this difficult relationship in both Washington and Moscow.

So, those are some of the areas in which we will be able to determine whether we made progress or not. And the President was very clear yesterday that “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”; that we’re not asserting any kind of “mission accomplished”; that we felt yesterday was productive, effective in creating a pathway to progress on some of these hard issues and a clear set of next steps for our two countries to work on.

But it by no means is the end of the story; it is the start of the story. And how the story ends will unfold here over the course, as he said, of the next six months to a year.

And, you know, let me just close on this call with where I started, which is — and it comes back a little bit to the McCarthy point — which is, I think — I really do not believe that it is hyperbole to say that Joe Biden returns from this trip as the clear and the consensus leader of the free world; that you’ve got the French president, when asked if America was back, saying, “Definitely.” You’ve got the leaders of democracies from both Europe and Asia extremely positive about Joe Biden’s personal presidential leadership and about American leadership writ large under his presidency.

And whether it’s standing with friends or engaging with difficult competitors like Vladimir Putin, Joe Biden showed throughout this trip that he is striding across the world stage with confidence and purpose and a singular focus on defending American interests and values and those of our allies.

And so, you know, we just — we really do feel good about it. It may be — it’s — these trips, you kind of finish them and you’re like, “All right, well that’s great. Now we got work to do.” And there’s an enormous amount of work to do, but we’re all ready for it.

So, sorry to go on for so long at the end, but really appreciate it. Thanks, guys.

MS. HORNE: All right, thanks, everyone, so much for joining. That concludes our call. Friendly reminder: We are on the record today and there is no embargo. Have a good afternoon.

1:18 P.M. EDT

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