

Remarks by President Biden and Chancellor Scholz of the Federal Republic of Germany at Press Conference

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East Room 3:40 P.M. EST

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Please, sit down. Thank you. Good afternoon.

I'd like to start by thanking Chancellor Scholz for making this visit to Washington. We had an opportunity to have a very productive meeting. I think our staffs wondered whether we were going to let them in at all. We spent the first half hour or more talking together, and — and it's been a very, very useful meeting.

One of the things that struck me was the shared values, and — that shape how each of us approaches leadership, among them the foundational commitment to the dignity of workers and the need to treat all people with respect.

So, I enjoyed speaking with you, Olaf. And I know, working together, we'll continue to strengthen and deepen our alliance and the extensive partnership between Germany and the United States.

Of course, at the top of our agenda today was our united approach to deterring Russia's threats against Ukraine and the longstanding principles of rule-based international order. That's what we spent most of our time talking about.

Germany and the United States, together with our Allies and partners, are working closely together to pursue diplomatic resolutions of this situation. And diplomacy is the very best way forward for all sides, we both agree, including best for Russia, in our view. And we have made it very clear we're ready to continue talks in good faith with Russia.

Germany has also been a leader in pushing de-escalation of tensions and encouraging dialogue through the Normandy Format. But if Russia makes the choice to further invade Ukraine, we are jointly ready and all of NATO is ready.

Today, the Chancellor and I discussed our close cooperation and developed a strong package of sanctions that are going to clearly demonstrate international resolve and impose swift and severe consequences if Russia violates Ukraine's sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

And I want to thank Germany and our — and all of our other partners in Eastern Europe — in the European Union for their work in this united effort. We are in agreement that it cannot be business as usual if Russia further invades.

We also discussed our shared commitment to NATO's Article 5 responsibilities and reassurance of our eastern flank allies. We're united in that as well.

Already, the United States is sending troops to reinforce the Alliance, and I want to thank the Chancellor of Germany for hosting additional U.S. forces and for the longstanding hospitality to our women and men in uniform.

We also discussed the challenges we're facing to the international order from China, along with Russia and other competitors that are pursuing more illiberal futures.

We've agreed that Germany and the United States will continue to work together to ensure that the rules and principles governing emerging technologies are geared to advance freedom of opportunity, not repression or authoritarianism.

We also reaffirmed our commitment to completing the work of integrating the Western Balkans into the European institutions and to finally realize a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

With Germany holding the presidency of the G7, we also talked about how that form can harness the world's leading democracies to advance a robust agenda of global — on global challenges, from ending the pandemic to addressing climate change.

So, the bottom line is this: Whether as Allies in NATO, partners through the European Union, as leaders of the G7 and G20, or through our strong bilateral relationship, Germany and the United States are close friends and reliable partners, and we can count on one another.

There is no issue of global importance where Germany and the United States are not working together strength-to-strength and applying and amplifying our efforts together.

So, I want to thank you, Olaf, for making the journey today. And I look forward to being the first of many opportunities we can spend together, beginning this meeting and throughout the rest of the year and the rest of our terms.

So, thank you and welcome. The floor is yours, sir.

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: (As interpreted.) Thank you very much. Good afternoon from my side as well. I'm very grateful that we had the opportunity to talk in much detail today, and that I was able to make my first official visit here and that we also could talk about the important questions that we're dealing with today.

We are in a very difficult situation, and it is a good thing that Joe and I were able to discuss what we need to do in this difficult context.

Of course, there is a military threat in Ukraine — against Ukraine, and we cannot remain silent on that. We see the number of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border, and that is a serious threat to European security. And this is why it is important that we act together, that we stand together, and that we do what is necessary together.

It is important that all allies — the U.S. and Germany, the transatlantic partnership between the U.S. and Europe, NATO — say the same thing, speak with one voice, and do things together. And we made it very clear: If there was a military aggression against Ukraine, this will entail severe consequences that we agreed upon together, severe sanctions that we have worked on together.

So, there will be a high price for Russia. This is a very clear message; everybody has understood it. And I think this message has been made clear again and again so that even Russia has understood the message now.

What is important is that we also intensively worked on preparing possible sanctions together. We don't want to start once there is a military aggression against Ukraine; we have prepared a reaction that will help us to react swiftly if needed, and we will do that.

At the same time, it is important to use all diplomatic means we have. And I'm very glad about your great willingness to move forward together, especially the bilateral talks between the U.S. and Russia, and, of course, the talks that we have agreed upon within the NATO-Russia format.

This is also important, also because Russia needs to understand that NATO stands together and that NATO is prepared. After so many years, there have not been any talks in this format. So, it is a good sign that they are happening now. Of course, we have controversial debates there, but it is important that we talk.

And the same is true for the OSCE where we need to discuss about security in Europe. This is also a progress, as tiresome as it may be. And we have not yet reached any very substantial conclusions yet, but it is good to see that this format plays a role now.

And the same is true for the talks between Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany — the Normandy Format. We have this format, but we haven't been able to really use it in a productive way over the last few years, so now we have come back to that format. We're having tough discussions in that format, and that shows that there are ways that will lead us out of this difficult situation.

And this dual-track approach of clear announcements with regard to sanctions that will be taken if there is a military aggression and, at the same time, keeping all dialogue formats open — I think this is the most promising strategy one can have. And that is what we're doing together, and we stand side by side in this approach.

We also talked about many other topics that are important for us today, especially when it comes to the G7 presidency of the Federal Republic of Germany. We will work closely as strong economies, strong democracies. And we also therefore have a special mandate to contribute to cohesion worldwide.

And part of this is that we continue to do everything we can to make sure that the citizens of the world can be vaccinated not only in our rich countries, but also in countries where people would love to have the vaccine but don't have access yet.

And these are initiatives that we have carried out together and that are of utmost importance worldwide.

The same is true for fighting manmade climate change — a big topic that keeps us all busy. Even though it is obvious that only a global solution can be successful, because climate is a global thing. It doesn't stop at national borders.

As an industrialized nation, we have an important contribution to make. We have technological opportunities, economic opportunities, and have to use them in order to prepare a situation where we and others can enjoy prosperity without harming the climate.

This is the big challenge that we see and that is of great importance to us. So, this is why we want to work together on this strategy and use a climate club of likeminded people and partners.

These are some of the topics we discussed. And once again, the personal discussion we had illustrates the excellent cooperation between our countries, the strong bond we have within our transatlantic partnership, and the fact that both countries can rely on each other.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Thank you very much. We'll now take a couple questions to each —

Reuters. Andra- — Andrea. You've got the first question.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you, Chancellor Scholz. Mr. President, I have wanted to ask you **about this Nord Stream project that you've long opposed. You didn't mention it just now by name, nor did Chancellor Scholz. Did you receive assurances from Chancellor Scholz today that Germany will, in fact, pull the plug on this project if Russia invades Ukraine? And did you discuss what the definition of "invasion" could be?**

And then, Chancellor Scholz:

(Speaks German.) (As interpreted.) If I may ask you, Chancellor Scholz — you said there was some strategic ambiguity that was needed in terms of sanctions. I just wanted to know whether the sanctions you are envisaging and the EU is working on — and the U.S. as well — are already finished, finalized, or is there still work ongoing?

And you're not really saying what the details are. Is that just an excuse for Germany, maybe, to not support the SWIFT measures?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: The first question first. If Germany — if Russia invades — that means tanks or troops crossing the — the border of Ukraine again — then there will be — we — there will be no longer a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it.

Q But how will you — how will you do that exactly, since the project and control of the project is within Germany's control?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: We will — I promise you, we'll be able to do it.

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: (As interpreted.) Thank you very much for your question. I want to be absolutely clear: We have intensively prepared everything to be ready with the necessary sanctions if there is a military aggression against Ukraine.

And this is necessary. It is necessary that we do this in advance so that Russia can clearly understand that these are far-reaching, severe measures.

It is part of this process that we do not spell out everything in public because Russia could understand that there might be even more to come. And, at the same time, it is very clear we are well prepared with far-reaching measures. We will take these measures together with our Allies, with our partners, with the U.S., and we will take all necessary steps. You can be sure that there won't be any measures in which we have a differing approach. We will act together jointly.

(Speaks in English.) And possibly this is a good idea to say to our American friends: We will be united, we will act together, and we will take all the necessary steps. And all the necessary steps will be done by all of us together.

Q And will you commit today — will you commit today to turning off and pulling the plug on Nord Stream 2? You didn't mention it, and you haven't mentioned it.

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: As I've already said, we are acting together, we are absolutely united, and we will not be taking different steps. We will do the same steps, and they will be very, very hard to Russia, and they should understand.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: You can recognize someone now, Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: Herr Fischer.

Q (As interpreted.) Michael Fischer, DPA. Mr. President, one question to you: The U.S., over the last few years, have exported heavy weapons to Ukraine, and Germany excludes that — has only delivered 5,000 helmets to Ukraine. Don't you think that NATO should act unanimously in this respect and Germany, as the strongest European NATO partner, should also deliver heavy weapons to Ukraine? And Ukraine has asked Germany to do so.

And on Nord Stream 2, I would also like to ask: Don't you think, with regards to the threat posed by Russia, Germany should already rethink its position on Nord Stream 2?

And the third question, if I may: Over the last few days and weeks, there has been severe criticism from the U.S. media and from Congress as well vis-à-vis Germany about the reliability of Germany as an ally. This has been called into question. Do you understand this criticism? Is Germany a reliable partner, from your point of view?

And, Mr. Chancellor, also a question to you: Nord Stream 2 — you said all options around the table. You're not mentioning Nord Stream 2 by name. Don't you think if you were to spell this out, you could win back trust as a strong ally here for the U.S.?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: There's no need to win back trust. He has the complete trust of the United States. Germany is our — one of our most important allies in the world. There is no doubt about Germany's partnership with the United States. None.

With regard to helping Ukraine, one of the largest contributors financially to Ukraine has been Germany. Germany has been in the forefront of making sure — providing economic assistance.

You also asked the question — you asked so many I can't remember them all. But in terms of the U.S. media saying Germany is not reliable, Germany is completely reliable — completely, totally, thoroughly reliable. I have no doubt about Germany at all.

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: (As interpreted.) We are united. And the transatlantic partnership between Germany and the U.S. is one of the permanent pillars of German policy, and it will be relevant in the future as well — just as relevant. And this will be one of our top priorities always.

On behalf of NATO, we are the country in continental Europe that is doing — making the largest contribution: financial means and also military power.

And we are the country that contributes a great share — we're not fully — we don't fully agree with you as who pays the biggest part of financial support to Ukraine. So, since 2014, about 2 billion U.S. dollars direct bilateral support and, within the EU, an additional 3.8 billion that is made available. So a substantial financial means to stabilize the Ukraine economy, and we are willing to continue with that sort of contribution.

So, this is the very strong and unbreakable friendship between our two countries. Part of this is that with regard to the difficult situation at the Ukrainian border due to the Russian troops, we have made it very clear we will unanimously act in terms of sanctions.

Q (As interpreted.) Mr. President, once again, a question with regard to arms exports. Do you think it is okay that NATO partners have different approaches here?

And on Nord Stream 2, once again, do you think the current positioning of Germany with regard to the Russian threat is okay?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Look, there is no doubt in America's mind that Germany is an incredibly reliable Ally and one of the leading physical powers in NATO, number one.

Number two, the notion that Nord Stream T [sic] would go — Nord Stream 2 would go forward with an invasion by the Russians — it's just not going to happen.

Now, Wall Street Journal, Sabrina.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Based on everything you know now, do you think that President Putin will authorize an invasion of Ukraine before the end of the winter?

And what is your message to the roughly 30,000 Americans who are currently in Ukraine? Do you think that they should leave the country?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Well, I've had discussions — numerous discussions with the — with the Russians and particularly with Putin. I don't know that he's even made a — I don't know that he knows what he's going to do. And I think he has to realize that it would be a gigantic mistake for him to move on Ukraine. The impact on Europe and the rest of the world would be devastating, and he would pay a heavy price.

I have been very, very straightforward and blunt with President Putin, both on the phone and in person. We will impose the most severe sanctions that have ever been imposed — economic sanctions — and there'll be a lot to pay for that down the road.

It will affect others as well. It will affect us somewhat. It will affect Europeans. But it will have profound impact on his economy.

And I — I — but I don't know. I know that he's in a position now to be able to invade almost — assuming that the ground is frozen above Kyiv. He has the capacity to do that. What he's going to do, I don't know. And I don't think anybody knows but him.

Q Is your message to the Americans who are currently in Ukraine — should they leave the country?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: I think it'd be wise to leave the country. Not — I don't mean our — I don't mean — I'm not talking about our diplomatic corps; I'm talking about Americans who are there. I'd hate to see them get caught in a crossfire if in fact they did invade. And there's no need for that. And I — if I were they — if I had anyone there, I'd say leave.

Q And to Chancellor Scholz: Can you outline specific steps that Germany is taking to reduce its energy dependence on Russia? And what do you say to those who suggest that German reliance on Russian gas is limiting Europe's options for how to respond to the crisis in Ukraine?

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: (As interpreted.) Thank you very much for raising that question because it gives me the opportunity to address a topic that's important to me. One good news, maybe, within its strategy on fighting manmade climate change, Germany has decided at very short — in a very short period of time to phase out of the use of oil and gas by — very soon. And by 2045, Germany will have a carbon neutral economy as one of the strongest economies of the world.

And with regard to these energies — we often think about heating at home and driving a car, but we're talking about industrial production: producing steel, chemical substances, cement. And changing these industrial processes and reorganizing such systems is what we have planned.

So, this year, we will continue to take far-reaching decisions that will help us to use more wind energy — offshore wind energy, onshore wind energy — and solar energy; and expand the capacities, expand the grids; and have a strategy for Germany but also worldwide on the use of hydrogen, which is a central element for us to change our industrial processes that are using oil and gas right now.

The industry is willing to be on board. We're doing this together with them, but it will probably be the biggest industrial modernization project in Germany in 100 years, with very good prospects that we will develop new technologies that other partners in the world can use as well, and this will help us fight climate change.

And, by the way, the energy mix today, we are talking about one quarter of our energy that is linked to gas. And only part of that gas comes from Russia; a big part comes from Norway or the Netherlands. And, of course, it is very important to us that we develop an infrastructure that will give us the opportunity to have all options available and react if needed.

So, you don't have to be concerned. There are some who should be concerned who see themselves maybe too much as a deliverer of such resources. Because we are focusing on renewable energies, we will go down that path and make sure that this is the profitable future.

Mr. Rinke.

Q (As interpreted.) Mr. President, I would like to ask you a question about LNG. Germany and Europe are much more dependent on Russian gas than other regions of the world, and you promised European allies to help with LNG. But this resource is more expensive; it's not available in the volumes that might be needed to replace Russian gas. And I would like to know from you how you would help Europeans in case of a conflict with Russia. Is this an empty promise, or what can you really do? What can you offer?

And, in addition, the U.S. are buying oil from Russia worth billions of dollars. And I would like to know whether these transfers are also part of the sanctions package against Russia.

And, Mr. Chancellor — liquefied natural gas. There is a big controversy in Germany about fracking gas and how far is LNG even a real replacement, or is it also with a view to the climate collab you intend to found. Is it really an alternative to Russian pipeline gas?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Let me respond. First of all, we are looking at opportunities to make up for lost gas — LNG — from Russia. We're underway of trying to see what we can do to do that and dealing with our friends around the world, as well. We think we could make up a significant portion of it that would be lost.

But, you know, what everybody forgets here is Russia needs to be able to sell that gas and sell that oil. Russia relies — a significant part of Russia's budget — it's the only thing they really have to export. And if, in fact, it's cut off, then they're going to be hurt very badly, as well. And it's of consequence to them as well. This is not just a one-way street.

And so, we are looking at what we could do to help compensate for loss of — immediate loss of gas in Europe if it occurs. And that's what we've been working on for some time now.

CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ: (As interpreted.) I can confirm that we work closely with the United States of America, and Joe Biden and I are working closely together as well.

We are prepared for all kinds of situation. And that's part of what we do when we say we prepare sanctions. That means we need to be able to react at any time, and this is happening.

With regard to the use of LNG, I can say that the biggest volume of LNG used across the world is gas, and that is part of the debate.

Concerning a long-term perspective, I already outlined what this is about. We will modernize our economy. And where gas is being used, we will switch to hydrogen. This will be a process that will happen faster than many might imagine today, and that will create a bright future for all of us.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Thank you. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Q One more on de-escalation, sir. Do you still believe there's an off-ramp for Vladimir Putin here?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Yes.

Q Sir, do you believe there's still an off-ramp for him — that de-escalation is an actual possibility, given that there are 100,000 troops at the border?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: The answer is "yes."

4:08 P.M. EST

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/07/remarks-by-president-biden-and-chancellor-scholz-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-at-press-conference/>

The White House

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