

White House Press Briefing  
07/14/21  
12:56:08 p.m.  
1 minute and 52 seconds

NANCY CORDES: Does the White House have a reaction to the charges that were filed against Iranian nationals, including Iranian intelligence officials for a plot to kidnap an activist on U.S. soil?

JEN PSAKI: Sure. First off, this is a law enforcement matter, of course, hence the announcement came out of there and we're not going to weigh in on specific allegations in the indictment. Overall, though, we categorically condemn Iran's dangerous and despicable reported plot to kidnap a U.S. citizen on U.S. soil. We will forcefully defend U.S. citizens and U.S. interests. That includes law-enforcement actions like the one announced yesterday as well as actions the President has taken to defend U.S. forces in the region from Iranian-backed militant groups. It also includes our diplomatic efforts to constrain Iran's nuclear program, one of our most important and urgent actions. But it — its actions to attempt to silence the voices of those peacefully working to address the situation, both inside of Iran and outside of Iran, that are appalling. We'll continue to speak out against that and, obviously, law enforcement authorities will take appropriate steps.

CORDES: And what kind of impact, if any, will this have on Iranian nuclear talks?

PSAKI: Well, it still remains — we have never assessed Iran to be a good actor in the world, not just by this — this plot to — to kidnap a U.S. — a person who is residing in the U.S., but their activities in the region which we've had great concern about and the President has taken retaliatory actions for. But at the same time, we still see in U.S. interests and in our national interests to engage an ongoing discussion so that we can have greater visibility to Iran's path to acquiring nuclear weapons. So, we will continue to pursue those talks, pursue the diplomatic passport which would think us in our interests and continued to be constructive.

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12:59:37 p.m.  
5 minutes and 42 seconds

PETER DOOCY: About voting rights and Texas lawmakers who have come to Washington —

PSAKI: Mmhmm.

DOOCY: — do you know any — of any examples from his 36 years in the Senate that Joe Biden just hopped on a train and left town to avoid a vote that he knew he was going to lose?

PSAKI: Welcome back. [ROOM LAUGHS] Look, I think that the President's view is these Texas legislators were making a statement through action in opposition to efforts in their state to

oppose restrictions on people's fundamental rights and the rights to vote in their state. That is why they departed. The Vice President met with these legislators yesterday and the Vice President — the President, I should say, certainly applauds their actions and their outspoken opposition to states — to efforts to put in place restrictive measures in their state.

DOOCY: And maybe it is funny to think about it that way, but the President is talking about this as the most serious assault —

PSAKI: I don't — I don't think —

DOOCY: — on democracy since —

PSAKI: — anything about —

DOOCY: — the Civil War.

PSAKI: — I don't think anything about this is funny. I think what is important to note, though, here is that there are 28 states including Texas where there are laws in place or in process to make it harder to vote. And it requires bold action, it requires bold voices to speak out and make sure people understand the rights. That is exactly what is happening here.

DOOCY: So, does the candidate who's now President who told people he was going to — he knew how to make deals with Republicans, he's meeting with Republicans today, does he think that the best way to prevent something bad from happening — that he thinks is bad from happening in Texas is for these lawmakers to be hiding out in a different state or for them to go back and sit at the table?

PSAKI: The President fundamentally believes you should work together in areas where you can find agreement, as he is on a bipartisan infrastructure framework that will help rebuild roadways, railways and bridges around our country. And also, that you should be outspoken where you have concerns about affronts to democracy. That's what he did yesterday and that's what these legislators are doing now.

DOOCY: And then, just quickly on Cuba, the DHS Secretary Mayorkas, is warning people there, if you take to the sea, you will not come to the United States. Why is that?

PSAKI: Well, first, I think it's important to understand the context of what the secretary was conveying yesterday, which is just that it is still the case that it is not — the way to come to the United States is not through — through processes of trying to come to the border without going through an asylum process or coming by sea without going through an asylum application process. There are certainly programs through which some of them have been — have not been reinstated, I should say, that were in place — put in place by the Trump administration that are being reviewed, as he said yesterday. That would apply to the individuals in — the people of Haiti and Cuba as well. Those have not been reinstated. They're being reviewed. That is what the secretary said yesterday. What he was reiterating is that this is not the time to travel irregularly.

It's dangerous. People can lose their lives as they have in the past.

DOOCY: And as the administration tries to figure out the root causes of migration to the country, don't we know that the reason people want to leave Cuba is because they don't like communism?

PSAKI: We —

DOOCY: And so, as you're trying to figure out, like, what the processes are for these people who want to leave Cuba. Does the President —

PSAKI: I'm not sure what your question is.

DOOCY: You guys have said a lot of times —

PSAKI: Why are people leaving Cuba or what is the process for them getting here? I can explain either of them, but you tell me.

DOOCY: Sure, yeah. Do you think that people are leaving Cuba because they don't like communism?

PSAKI: I think we've been pretty clear that we think people are leaving Cuba — or not — leaving Cuba or protesting in the streets as well because they are opposed to the oppression, to the mismanagement of the government in the country. And we certainly support their right to protest. We support their efforts to speak out against their treatment in Cuba. I will say, separately, an important question is what happens when people are seeking protection or what happens when they are attempting to flee? In the past, as I noted, we have had several humanitarian programs such as Family Reunification Parole Programs for Haiti and Cuba. Those are processes in-place prior to the Trump administration. Those have not been turned back on as the Secretary Mayorkas said yesterday. He also said we are assessing the status of those parole programs, Haitian and Cuban nationals in the U.S. with a fear of return may be eligible for protection, such as asylum, under U.S. law. Haitian nationals already in the United States may be eligible for temporary protected status. But migrants interdicted in the Caribbean who manifest a fear are referred to U.S. CIS for a protection screening. That's what happens. Those who do not manifest a fear or who are not found to have a credible fear following this screening are repatriated to their country of origin. Those found to have a well-founded fear of persecution or fear are not brought to the United States. They are referred to a third country for resettlement. I'm sharing all of that with you so people understand what the process is when they're trying to make — what a treacherous journey is and a challenging journey where people can lose their lives. But certainly, we have said many times and I will reiterate here that we support not just the — the role of — of protest and peaceful protests, we stand with the Cuban people in their call for freedom from both the pandemic and decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba's authoritarian regime.

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1:06:52 p.m.

1 minute and 24 seconds

ALEX LEARY: Just to return to Cuba, will we hear from the President this week? He said the other day that he would speak out on that and secondly, is his position still that he feels that the Trump policies were a failure and didn't affect change? Is that still his policy?

PSAKI: Well, again, I would say — one, in terms of whether you'd hear from him, he says that often, as you know, and what he means is he speaks out publicly nearly every day at events. Sometimes, you ask him questions. If there's an update to provide on what we're doing, on what our policies are, certainly he'll provide that. Is there a planned speech or trip? Not at this time. In terms of our policies, again, I would say, Alex, that we are continuing to review our policies. It's been an ongoing process to review the policies in place by the prior administration. We also recognize that this was a significant event over the last couple of days. The largest protest in a long time that we saw in Cuba. People speaking out — Cuban people speaking out, calling for freedom from both the pandemic and decades of repression. That's significant. And, of course, that will play a role as we factor in what our politics will be moving forward. I would also note, though, that we will do that through the prism of what will help the people of Cuba, not what will help pad the pockets of the regime and that is a challenging circumstance given the control of the — of the regime currently on the people.

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1:12:56 p.m.  
21 seconds

MARIO PARKER: And then on voting rights, civil rights leaders and activists have characterized the President's reluctance to mention the filibuster as a lack of urgency on the issue. I mean, what do you say to those critics say that a lack of urgency that he hasn't yet pushed senators to support abandoning or modifying the filibuster to get this legislation passed?

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1:15:58 p.m.  
1 minute and 37 seconds

MATT VISER: One more crack on the filibuster thing.

PSAKI: Go ahead.

VISER: The Vice President yesterday when he was asked about changing it to have carve out for voting rights said: "I'm certainly having conversations with folks. Is the President also having conversations or is he sort of yielding completely on the idea of — of changing the filibuster given that yesterday he compared the current state of democracy as in peril, comparing it to the Civil War. So is he talking to people about these legislative tools that could be changed, is he having the conversations?"

PSAKI: Well, first, of course, the President and vice President are having conversations about a range of issues including members who raise concerns or their advocacy for changing filibuster rules. Some also advocate against, as you well know, but what the Vice President was acknowledging that some members have raised filibuster reform with her, as it won't surprise any of you and — and members have raised it with the President but they've raised it on different sides as well and ultimately, it's a legislative process. One that the President is no longer — gets a vote on. It's up to them to vote on what their processes will be moving forward.

VISER: So, he is having conversations. Is he advocating any particular way? Is he expressing an opinion to end those conversations?

PSAKI: Again, they both heard from members who have points of view on the future of the filibuster, as won't surprise any of you, that's what the vice President was referring to and the President also has, of course, been part of those conversations but his position I've stated to all of you publicly is what his position is privately as well.

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1:20:40 p.m.

1 minute and 47 seconds

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #1: So, as we speak, outside, right now, there's solidarity protests with the Cuban people right outside the fences of the White House. We've been seeing all across the country here and Democratic lawmakers in South Florida have actually called on Biden to come down to Miami to give a speech. You all are reviewing your policies but is there a way that you believe that, either to answer these calls, that you can more forcefully show support for the Cuban people in that way or is there anything in the works?

PSAKI: Through a speech?

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #1: Yeah. Like, he's been asked, so —

PSAKI: Well, I certainly understand that, but I — I would say that, I think, what is most important to the Cuban people is understanding that the United States stands with them and their call for freedom from both the pandemic and from the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they been subjected — subjected by Cuba's authoritarian regime and also, I would just note that, again, it is a policy process that has been under review. There were a number of policies that were put in place by the prior administration. We want to do that in a comprehensive and not a one-off manner. We want to do it through the prism of what is going to help the Cuban people directly and help incentivize a change in behavior if that is possible and certainly the protests, the reaction, the continued oppression of the Cuban people weighs in on our decision-making process but I don't have any speech or visit to preview for you.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #1: And then — so then on policy changes, on the campaign trail, Biden promised that he would reinstate the Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program. Is that, can you give us a readout maybe on where that process has gone so far in these comprehensive

reviews or —

PSAKI: There's, again, an ongoing review. Of course, the events and the protests and the reaction and continued oppression of the Cuban people will weigh in on our — will be a factor in our decision-making process but I don't have anything to preview .

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1:23:40 p.m.

3 minutes and 4 seconds

APRIL RYAN: Yesterday in Philadelphia after the speech, Reverend Al Sharpton said it was a momentous speech. He said the President talked on race, but what was missing was the word filibuster and what he was going to do. Also after the speech, we talked to the NAACP President Derek Johnson, who said that he was concerned there was no path forward and there was no sense of urgency. I'm going back to that other question, but giving a little more specifics as to what was said, can you address that about the path forward, the filibuster, and sense of urgency? The President talked about equating this moment to the civil war, but where was the urgency in moving it forward — the path forward and, also, the issue of the filibuster that's holding this whole thing up?

PSAKI: Well, April, I'd also say that the President of the Southern Poverty Law Center said that "President Biden accurately characterized the anti-democracy actions by state legislators and others following January 6" and "President Biden's speech today ultimately was a needed call to action for this multiracial coalition of democracy defenders in this country to rise to the urgency of the moment." The President of UNIDOS-U.S. said, "I commend the President for asserting the importance of voting rights, especially as we are seeing numerous states enact voting rules that are restrictive and discriminatory for Blacks and Brown communities." The President delivered the speech yesterday because he knows that there is still not enough information out there, not enough empowerment, not engagement with people across the country about what their rights are and what is happening in states across the country that is oppressing and silencing their right to have their voices heard. That's why he delivered the speech. We — part of our focus is continuing to press for the For the People Act. He will continue to do that and the John Lewis voting rights Act and he will stand with civil rights leaders who were just here at the White House last week to have a conversation about how they can work together to move this forward. He's also not going to wait on that. He — obviously, the Department of Justice has already took — take [sic] action in Georgia. they will make decisions about taking action to fight against these oppressive laws around the country. We're continuing to implement the executive order. We're continuing to fund efforts around the country to educate and inform citizens, so he's delivered the speech to make sure people knew what their rights are and make sure people knew what he was doing to fight against efforts to oppress.

RYAN: So, what about the pathway forward, though, from this administration? What do you — I mean, you're telling the coalition groups to go out and act. The President said that yesterday, but what is the path forward? What is the formula that this administration has to making sure that HR-1 is passed and that HR-4 comes behind it — HR-1 and S. 1 are passed then HR-4 moves

forward?

PSAKI: Well, I — I don't have details on a legislative strategy to outline for you here. We are going to continue to work with leaders in the Senate, leaders in the House who, as you know, are huge advocates for moving these pieces of legislation forward. And we're going to continue to lift and empower voices across the country to ensure that people understand who — who have a vote how important this is to citizens across the country.

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1:29:18 p.m.

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UNIDENTIFIED MCCLATCHY REPORTER: Given the lack of internet access in Cuba, how is the administration monitoring the situation, the crackdown on protesters, and if the administration determines that there is violence against protesters, what options are at the President's disposal?

PSAKI: Well, first, I would say we continue to call for the swift release of those peaceful protesters who have been unjustly detained. Again, we stand with the Cuban people and their call for freedom from both the pandemic and from decades of repression. The protests, as you all know, have largely stopped because of the regime's violent crackdown and retaliatory measures against Cubans exercising their fundamental and universal rights. This is unacceptable. Of course, we will continue to call for a change in approach and continue to review our own policies about what is possible and work with our partners around the world in a coordinated fashion as well.

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UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #2: I know that President Biden has previously said that his administration is going to work to address illegal immigration in Central America by address root causes of it, including corruption. And I'm wondering, with what we're seeing right now in Cuba and Haiti, I would think that would suggest that that can a very long and tricky process that can lead to very dangerous situations. Do you think that throws any sort of wrench into the administration's kind of plan to address illegal immigration in Central America in that way?

PSAKI: I don't think so, but tell me more about your question.

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER #2: I mean, I'm just asking, you know, given what we are seeing in Cuba and Haiti, it's clear that trying to address these issues, while I think everyone would agree that's important, leads to potentially, you know, a lot of unrest due — does that give anybody pause in the Biden administration for addressing illegal immigration in Central America in that way?

PSAKI: No.