

White House press briefing [via CBSN]

02/23/22

3:39:46 p.m.

3 minutes and 14 seconds

AP REPORTER: A new AP poll found that 26 percent of Americans want the U.S. to play a major role in this — this crisis. Given that this could increase costs on American — gas prices, other economic ripples — has the White House done enough to prepare Americans for what the U.S. role could be and what impact it could be on their lives?

JEN PSAKI: Well, this is very important to the President personally. It's why he gave remarks — delivered the remarks he did last week and why he has spoken several times to provide updates to the American people over the last couple of days. Two pieces that I would note that I think are very important as Americans are tuning in and learning more about this potential conflict, this conflict that's underway, I guess I should say, between Russia and Ukraine. One, the President has no intention of sending U.S. military or U.S. troops to fight in Ukraine. It is hard to know cause I don't think it was in the poll how people assess what major involvement means, but that has not changed in terms of the President's view and his approach. Second is he is going to do everything he can to reduce the impact on energy costs for the American people and that means engaging closely with partners around the world. It means considering a range of options that are all on the table to reduce the market — the impact on the oil markets. And that — that is what will impact energy costs. The last thing I would say is that the President and the White House, you know, we make national security decisions based on what's best for our country's national security and not on the latest polling. And, if you step, what hopefully the American people will see and have seen is that, while Russia has sought to divide our allies and the American people, the President sought to revitalize our partnerships and alliances and unite our country. He's standing up for our national security interests and bedrock democratic values against the aggression of a dictator threatening to further invade a sovereign country. That's why he's doing what he's doing. So, we're less focused on the politics of Ukraine and more focused on preventing a war. [TO CECILIA VEGA] Go ahead.

AP REPORTER: The other one I have is, yesterday, the administration said the goal of the sanctions is to prevent and deter a wider invasion of Ukraine. If Russia does attack, as the U.S. officials are warning that they're imminently prepared to do, does that mean that that strategy failed?

PSAKI: Well, I would say, as we look at it, we're focused on accomplishing two things. One is implementing serious costs for the actions that have already been taken, so the actions in the Donbas and we've taken steps beyond what we did in 2014, which I obviously just outlined at the beginning of the briefing. Second, yes, deterrence is part of the objective. If he goes further, we will go further. We have a range of tools at our disposal. I mentioned some of the potential financial — or potential steps we could take to impact financial institutions. That is — is very significant and could have a very significant impact. But we have far more options beyond that, including export controls and what export control steps would mean, you know, Russia, as President Putin looks to the future of Russia, there is a lot of access to different industries,

technologies he needs and would rely on in order to for the economy to grow and flourish in the future. Where it's AI, whether it's other technological sectors — bio tech, semiconductors — a term we've used a lot in here. And what this would do would essentially cut off access to that. That would also be a significant step. So, point is we have more steps we can take and we're going to continue to apply those if he escalates.

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3:47:32 p.m.

3 minutes and 5 seconds

JEFF MASON: President Putin said on Monday that he felt the west was going to impose sanctions basically regardless of what they did. Given that, you're obviously trying, and effectively putting a lot of pain on the Russian economy. Do you think these sanctions will actually be a deterrent?

PSAKI: Well, I think that is a decision for President Putin to make. I mean, there are statements he has conveyed in terms of what he wants to achieve here, right? The division of NATO, the opposite is happening, right? He wanted to see Nord Stream 2 move forward, a key prize for him. That is obviously not happening. He wants a flourishing economy for the Russian people. Just even without the bite of our sanction, that is clearly not happening. This is an assessment held have to make. And we expect to hear from people around him who are being impacted and other people in Russia about the impact of these sanctions. [TO KAITLAN COLLINS] Go ahead.

KAITLAN COLLINS: Does the White House share the assessment of the Australian prime minister today that an attack is likely within 24 hours?

PSAKI: I'm not going to give an additional timeline to it. We have been saying it could happen at any time and they have been in attack position for some time now, but I'm not going to give you an additional day, hour, moment.

COLLINS: But, just to follow up on that, you have been saying it's imminent for some time. You guys stopped for a little bit —

PSAKI: Yeah.

COLLINS: — for a little bit then you went back to it. Has there been a new warning to the Ukrainians in the last 24 hours or so? Because it seems that CNN and others are reporting they have shared new intelligence about the threat of just how quickly an attack could happen.

PSAKI: We don't know what that's based on. We have been conveying in close touch with the Ukrainians. We have been conveying that they are capable of operationalizing at any time. That has been the case. I would note that obviously our preference would be that President Putin doesn't further invade and, as I said a few minutes ago, we're assessing that he has had to adjust, adapt to the strength of the unity of the global community to what our reaction has been and he

has been forced to — need to respond and adapt his own actions. We will see. We still very much anticipate and predict he will invade further. But, again, we're also seeing an impact on how he's behaving.

COLLINS: And Nord Stream 2, last month, the WH opposed an effort on Capitol Hill to put sanctions on this pipeline. Last year, of course, President Biden waived the sanctions on that. And now, today, he is imposing the sanctions on it, which is a pretty big shift. So, can you just explain the changes and where you —

PSAKI: Well, we don't see it as a shift at all. We have never supported the pipeline. It was 90 percent built when the President took office. We have always spoken out against the pipeline. The question was what was the most effective step in order to — to have the result that we have now over the last 24 hours and there were calls by some in Congress to do pre-emptive sanctions on — or earlier sanctions — or take earlier steps, I should say, on Nord Stream 2. We disagreed with that strategy. We worked through a diplomatic path with the Germans. You saw the German chancellor make the announcement yesterday and the announcement today was complimentary to that.

COLLINS: So, the change is just because you were waiting on the Germans to take the first step here?

PSAKI: Well, actually, it was actually that we felt a diplomatic approach would be the most effective approach and we have succeeded in our efforts and we didn't think the alternative approach was the right one.

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3:52:24 p.m.

5 minutes and 22 seconds

WEIJIA JIANG: [Deputy national security adviser Daleep Singh] said that the administration would not give a time frame for when Americans might feel the impact of this conflict. Why not? I mean, the President has said we need to be honest about the cost of fighting for democracy. Can you share anything about the time frame, a range, should people be saving money?

PSAKI: Well, I think, Weijia, there's been a little confusion about this because, one, the sanctions that we announced yesterday will not have an impact on the American people. They will have an impact on the Russian elite, on financial institutions, on individuals who are trying to use those institutions to engage with — with western banks, including President Putin and his inner circle. What we're seeing in the markets is an anticipation of a further invasion by President Putin and what we're trying to do and focus on is take every step we can, working around the world with our counterparts and partners to minimize the impact on the global energy market. So, that's what we're working on. We're working on minimizing that, but there is not an impact from the sanctions we have announced on the American public. It really depends in part on what President Putin does in many regards.

JIANG: And, finally, is one of the options looking at releasing more oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve?

PSAKI: That is certainly an option on the table. [TO PETER DOOCY] Go ahead, Peter.

PETER DOOCY: Thanks, Jen. And following up on Weijia's question —

PSAKI: Yeah.

DOOCY: — a lot of focus on the economic pain in Russia potentially from these sanctions, but what about the economic pain here? The Russians are saying they think gas prices in Europe are going to double. How high could they get here?

PSAKI: Well, I think again, Peter, and as I said to Weijia, I mean, some of this depends on what President Putin does. So, as he's suggesting the impact around the world, it's all based on what his actions are, just to be very clear about it. What the President is focused on and working on is taking every step we can to — to communicate with, coordinate with, engage with big global suppliers around the world to minimize the impact on the energy market.

DOOCY: But even without this going on, gas in California is almost \$5 a gallon. Should people across the country expect to see that kind of a number when they go to gas up their car? \$5? \$6?

PSAKI: Well, again, I think as you heard the President say last week, standing up for our values is not without cost. What we're trying to do is minimize the cost. So I don't have a prediction of it right now because we're trying to minimize the impact on the global energy markets.

DOOCY: Okay. Something that you said — two different things that you've said so far today. You said you think right now, Putin is improvising and adapting, but you've also said that you very much anticipate and predict that he's going to invade further. So which is it? Is he adapting or is he still invading?

PSAKI: Think big here, Peter. He can be preparing to invade, which we have said and that continues to be the case while making adaptations of when, if, how to what his strategy is. That what we're seeing. Both are true.

DOOCY: If that's what you're seeing, you announced the sanctions yesterday.

PSAKI: Yeah.

DOOCY: Did any Russian military units turn around and head back towards Russia?

PSAKI: Again, I'm not going to get into assessments from here of movements of any military, but also what we're trying to do is prevent a war, prevent devastation on the Ukrainian people. And we're already seeing the impact on the economy in Russia. We're going to continue to make clear that are much — that is — if he continues to escalate, we will as well.

DOOCY: And as we wait to see if or how Russia might retaliate against the U.S., FBI is reportedly warning businesses about cyber security risks. So, why did you say there is no current threat as it relates to cyber here?

PSAKI: There is no current threat as it relates to cyber here. The FBI and all of the agencies in the government always provide regular updates on what businesses and entities should do to prepare for the potential for. There is still no immediate specific threat.

DOOCY: But on Friday, the deputy national security advisor for cyber came in here to say we don't have the level of cyber resilience that we wish. Why would somebody come to the White House Briefing Room and talk about that if there is no threat?

PSAKI: Because we anticipate that there could be continuing threats in the future and what we need private sectors to do is harden their cybersecurity abilities now. Now is the time to do it.

DOOCY: Okay. And finally, the State Department spokesman today said you guys are doing everything you reasonably can to prevent human rights abuses, atrocities, and potential war crimes in Ukraine. How can you say that if all you're announcing is financial punishment?

PSAKI: That isn't all we're announcing. We have provided a range of assistance to Ukraine, humanitarian assistance, security assistance, the most of any year in history. We will continue to build on all of this assistance. We are plussing up support for partners and allies in the region to ensure they know we have their backs and we are abiding by the NATO obligations. And we continue to provide, I think what he was referring to, is a range of public information as well to make clear that the intentions are of the Russians, to call them out for the type of actions we can see them taking in the future.

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4:07:38 p.m.

1 minute and 6 seconds

ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS: And you were telling — I think you told Kaitlan that you wanted this approach with Germany rather than an alternative. Just looking at the President last year saying in Cincinnati that construction is already going at this point I believe, 94 —

PSAKI: 90 percent of it, yeah.

KANNO-YOUNGS: — right, right, he was saying 90 percent. So, why is this a better, more effect you have way than issuing sanctions unilaterally and then possibly pressuring the Germans to take action themselves?

PSAKI: Well, it hasn't been operational which is an important component, right? It's not like oil has been flowing through Nord Stream 2, which is a very important component here and we made the assessment and others can have the different assessments that this would be the

outcome we have achieved. Others can have different assessments. There's no proof or evidence that their approach would have worked. Ours has worked.

KANNO-YOUNGS: More so the question was: Why — why would not issuing sanctions last year earlier — why wouldn't that have been effective? And why is this —

PSAKI: Because we felt working in coordination with our German counterparts through a diplomatic process would be the most effective way to approach it.

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4:11:36 p.m.

39 seconds

JOEY GARRISON: But if Russia does invade further as it — you know, there are indications that it could — does that mean that those sanctions imposed yesterday and imposed today were a failure?

PSAKI: Well, again part of them were cost. Part of them is an effort to prevent a war. We're doing that not alone, but in coordination with our partners and allies around the world. That is the way to do it. That is the strong way to do it. That is the effect you have way to do it. There may be others who have different points of view. They are welcome. It's a free country they can have the points of view. But our approach has been to date to — to respond with strong sanctions, to start high and build from there and that is what we will continue to do if he escalates.