

FNC's *America's Newsroom With Bill Hemmer & Dana Perino*

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DANA PERINO: Well, joining us now is White House press secretary Jen psaki and we know you have a long day ahead of you and you've been so busy. So, thank you for carving out time for us this morning.

JEN PSAKI: Good morning. Thanks for having me.

PERINO: Absolutely. So, Volodmyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine — he got a standing ovation at the E.U. this morning and there's no doubt that he has helped unify a lot of the west and we can all be inspired by him. A couple of questions based on something he asked this morning and that is something I wonder what President Biden thinks. Does he believe that Vladimir Putin has committed war crimes in this invasion?

PSAKI: Well, we've seen a range of reports, Dana, that are horrifying about the use of barbaric tactics, whether it's cluster bombs or other tactics that we've seen that could be classified as a war crime. I don't have any new classification for you from here but we are certainly engaged closely with our partners around the world, the President is, our national security team is, and we'll be closely watching and assessing that question.

PERINO: Has the President directed the State Department lawyers to start to prosecute the case?

PSAKI: Well, again, this is something we would need confirmation of — we would need to assess. A classification of a war crime is obviously a serious — a serious decision to be made. It goes through lawyers as you noted and as you well know, Dana — and we would work closely with the international community. So, I don't have an update at this point in time. But there's no question, as you have been reporting through the course of this show, that we're seeing barbaric tactics start to be used. That is horrifying. That is troubling and we will certainly be looking closely at it.

PERINO: There's been some calls for more realtime intelligence to be shared with the Ukrainians. Is that something that is on the table?

PSAKI: We have been in very close touch with Ukrainians. Our national security advisor talks to his counterpart every day — if not, nearly every day. The President has been in touch with President Zelensky and we have been sharing with them a range of information through the course of the last several weeks and I expect that will continue.

PERINO: They — but they complain — gently, they're complaining, but they're frustrated. They say that intelligence is coming too late for them to do anything about it.

PSAKI: Well, I can't get into too much detail, Dana, as you know about intelligence sharing, but

it is something we've been communicating closely with them through the course of the last several weeks. We'll continue to. We have their backs. We — as I would note that when President Zelensky last spoke with President Biden, he asked for more security assistance. President turned it around and delivered that, had his team work to deliver that immediately. We're expediting the delivery of that, so I can assure you we're in close touch. We are trying to do everything we can to provide them assistance, whether security assistance, weapons, military assistance, humanitarian assistance that they need at this very challenging time on the ground.

BILL HEMMER: Yeah. And, Jen, Bill Hemmer. Thanks for your time. Again, thanks for coming back. We buy Russia's oil and we don't need to. Will the President make an appeal tonight to Americans based on some sort of shared sacrifice that perhaps would lead people because the polls suggest that American people will listen to you. They will consume less in order to help Ukrainian people and hurt Putin more. Will that be part of his message tonight?

PSAKI: Well, here is what the President looks at, Bill. He looks at what steps — he has been looking at what steps we can take to maximize the impact on President Putin, on the cronies and the oligarchs who have been benefiting from so much corruption in Russia for decades. He's looking at that, how we can squeeze the financial system there. We've seen over the past couple of days even just the plummeting of the ruble, the skyrocketing of inflation. They have serious financial problems on the ground in Russia that is impacting President Putin and the circle around him. What he also looks at, though, and we are very cognizant of is minimizing the impact on the global markets and the American people. So we — we have not taken options off the table including the one you mentioned, but that is something the President looks very closely at. I would note, Bill, that right now, the IEA — the international energy agency — is meeting to discuss what can be done to help mitigate any impacts on the global marketplace. But we will continue —

HEMMER: Just to be clear, though, this —

PSAKI: — to take steps to maximize.

HEMMER: — will not be a direct appeal tonight anyway. That won't happen, correct? That's that you're saying?

PSAKI: Well, I would say — I would say, Bill, you have heard the President say before that taking — standing up for democracy, standing up for democracy versus autocracy is not without cost. What is happening here and any instability in the global oil marketplace is the result of the actions of President Putin and his invasion of Ukraine. And the steps we've taken that have gone far beyond any steps that have taken in the past as it relates to sanctions, we're already seeing an enormous impact on the financial markets in Russia, but we don't want to destabilize the global markets or — or the markets for the American people, so that's the balance we're striking.

PERINO: On energy, you know, we've seen an up close and personal view of what happens when nations get too dependent on someone like Russia for their energy and state of the union addresses are usually about the accomplishments, so you can get some applause and then you

figure out where you want to go in the future, but some of the accomplishments President Biden might point to are seen by a majority of people in the country to be vulnerabilities. One on the energy front in particular. Is — will there be anything in the speech to talk about reversing some of those policies, for example, either, Keystone pipeline or allowing our oil and gas companies to pursue federal oil and gas leases even while we try to transition in the future with a smart path to greener energy?

PSAKI: Well, I would say the President shares the concern about any impact on gas prices, on energy prices for the American people and that's why a range of options remain on the table. He already recently tapped into the strategic petroleum reserve just last fall, which had an impact. But I would say the Keystone —

PERINO: But it had a very —

PSAKI: — pipeline —

PERINO: — but the impact, Jen, that was pretty — that was —

HEMMER: A blip.

PSAKI: — but the —

PERINO: — a blip. You know, it was a ten cents thing, but it doesn't last.

PSAKI: — but, Dana, the policies you mentioned I know Senator Cotton and others have mentioned are not policies that would address the issue at all. This Keystone pipeline? It would take years for that to have an impact on prices. Obviously, there are a range of reasons why the President opposes it but it wasn't functioning, isn't functioning. It would take years. There are also 9,000 approved oil leases that oil companies are not tapping into. So yes, we all want to take steps to address any raise in gas prices that impacts the American people but we should be very clear about what policies will help and what policies will not help. And over time, we absolutely need to reduce our dependence and that's something you're seeing European countries take steps to do as well.

PERINO: I was just — the point on that is it took Europe years to get to the point where they were completely dependent or 60 percent dependent on Russia.

HEMMER: Jen, there are no masks in Washington, D.C. as of midnight last night.

PSAKI: That's right.

HEMMER: What changed?

PSAKI: No masks in the White House, Bill. We're not wearing masks.

HEMMER: What changed in the science yesterday, Monday —

PSAKI: Well, Bill —

HEMMER: — opposed to a week ago Monday?

PSAKI: — it actually — it wasn't actually yesterday, Bill. What the CDC did is they put out guidance last Friday that identified recommendations depending on what the hospitalization rates are in your part of the country. We're currently in a part of the country in Washington, D.C. where it's very low, the rates. So we're not — the recommendation is not to wear masks. So, we aren't wearing masks at the white house. The President's not going to wear a mask tonight. But it's different in — depending on the part of the country.

HEMMER: Okay, so maybe it's a question for the CDC, but different parts of the country, they've moved on. Last question. I'm almost out of time. CBS came out with a poll overnight. Approval rating for the President on the economy is at 38 percent. Approval rating for the President on inflation is at 30 percent. How does he convince people he has helped improve their lives over the past year?

PSAKI: Well, Bill, as we look to tonight, which we all recognize is a huge opportunity for any president to speak to the American people, he will definitely spend time in his speech talking about the conflict in Ukraine, his efforts to rally the world, to lead the world in responding to and standing up to autocratic leadership and the offensive and horrific actions of President Putin. But what people will also hear from him for a great deal of the speech is his plan, not only the progress we've made. We've made a lot of economic progress but commitment to addressing prices, addressing costs, addressing inflation. And it will be part of what he talks about this evening in the speech.

PERINO: All right, Jen. How long are we going to be sitting here for this speech tonight?

PSAKI: Dana, as you know from being — having gone through a few of these.

PERINO: They grow.

PSAKI: Speeches always get longer, so it's always trying to get them shorter. Look, I don't have a word count quite yet. There's a lot to — lot of — lot the President wants to say to the American people this evening, so I expect we'll have a better sense as we get closer to 9:00 p.m.

PERINO: Alright. Alright.

HEMMER: Okay, thank you for your time, Jen Psaki.

PERINO: Thank you so much. Thank you.

PSAKI: Thank you both.

HEMMER: Thank you.