

White House press conference [via FNC's *The Story*]

03/28/22

3:10:48 p.m.

3 minutes and 56 seconds

KELLY O'DONNELL: Do you believe what you said, that Putin can't remain in power or do you now regret saying that because your government has been trying to walk that back. Do your words complicate matters?

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: Well, you asked three different questions. I'll answer them all. Number one, I'm not walking anything back. The fact of the matter is, I was expressing the moral outrage I felt toward the way Putin is dealing and the actions of this man, just — just brutality, half the children in Ukraine. I just came from being with those families and — and so — but I want to make it clear. I wasn't there or nor am I now articulating a policy change. I was expressing moral outrage that I feel and make no apologies.

O'DONNELL: Personal feelings sir? They're personal feelings?

BIDEN: My personal feelings. Secondly, you asked me about — well, what was this second part?

O'DONNELL: Does it complicate the diplomacy of this moment?

BIDEN: No, I don't think it does. You know, the — the fact is that we're in a situation where it — what complicates the situation at the moment are the escalatory efforts for Putin to continue to engage in carnage, the kind of behavior that makes the whole world say my god, what is this man doing? That's what complicates things a great deal and — but I don't think it complicates it at all. Let me go to Steve Holland, Reuters.

STEVE HOLLAND: Mr. President, thank you. When you say you're not walking anything back, you do feel that Vladimir Putin should be remained [sci] — removed from power? Is what you're saying?

BIDEN: I was expressing just what I said. I was expressing the moral outrage that I felt towards this man. I wasn't articulating a policy change and I think that, you know, he continues on this course that he's on, he is going to become a pariah worldwide and who knows what he becomes at home in terms of support.

HOLLAND: Just to follow up, are you concerned this remark might escalate the conflict?

BIDEN: No, I'm not. Not at all.

HOLLAND: Why's that sir? Thank you.

BIDEN: Look, the other thing is that a couple of people have asked me as well — might as well speak to it unless you want to ask the question, but you know, the other governments have

suggested that this is a problem, I'm escalating things. No. Has it weakened NATO? No, it hasn't. NATO has never ever, ever, ever, ever been as strong as it is today. Never.

KAITLAN COLLINS: So if saying he cannot remain in power doesn't mean regime change, what does it mean, in your view?

BIDEN: It means — I was expressing my outrage. He shouldn't remain in power. Just like, you know, bad people shouldn't continue to do bad things. But it doesn't mean we have a fundamental policy to do anything to take Putin down in any way.

COLLINS: What made you add that? Because that wasn't in your prepared remarks, we were told. So, what made you add that at the end, Mr. President?

BIDEN: Because I was talking about — I was talking to the Russian people. The last part of the speech was talking to the Russian people, telling them what we thought and I was communicating this to not only the Russian people but the whole world. This is — this stating a simple fact that this kind of behavior is totally unacceptable. Totally unacceptable and the way to deal with it is to strengthen and put — keep NATO completely united and help Ukraine where we can. Cleve, you had a question. Where is he?

CLEVE WOOTSON: Thanks, Mr. President. On your budget, you've said repeatedly at the State of the Union that you're not for defunding the police. I do wonder how much emphasis you think should be put on alternative forms of crime prevention, not just defunding the police, but you know, crime reduction in communities?

(....)

3:15:25 p.m.
55 seconds

WOOTSON: Just a follow-up — is any of it related to political pressure from Republicans saying that Democrats are soft on crime, that you know, you guys are careening to the left.

BIDEN: Ain't that kind of fascinating? When I first got elected, I was being beat up because I supported the police too much for the previous 30 years. No. That's what I think. And Asma.

ASHMA KHALID: Mr. President, thank you. Mr. President, are you willing to try to meet with Vladimir Putin? And I have a quick follow up for that. When you last met with him face to face in Geneva, you described it as a productive conversation. You said he didn't want a cold war and do you feel given the actions that have happened the last few months — I'm asking what has changed in his mind?

(....)

3:17:37 p.m.

5 minutes and 57 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Mr. President, thank you. Thank you very much.

BIDEN: I know you're going to ask a really nice question.

DOOCY: Well, it's — it's an important question, I think.

BIDEN: No, I'm teasing.

DOOCY: Are you worried that other leaders in the world are going to start to doubt that America is back if some of these big things that you say on the world stage keep getting walked back?

BIDEN: What's getting walked back?

DOOCY: It made it sound like, just in the last couple days, sounded like you told U.S. troops that they were going to Ukraine, it sounded like you said it was possible the U.S. would use a chemical weapon, and it sounded like you were calling for regime change in Russia. And we know —

PSAKI: None of the three occurred.

DOOCY: None of the three occurred?

BIDEN: None of the three.

DOOCY: Mr. President —

BIDEN: You interpret the language that way. I was talking to the troops. We were talking about helping train the troops in — that are — the Ukrainian troops that are in Poland. That's the context. I sat there with those guys for a couple hours. That's what we talked about.

DOOCY: So when you said you're going to see when you're there, you were not intending to send U.S. troops —

BIDEN: I was referring to — with — being with and talking with the Ukrainian troops that were in Poland.

DOOCY: And when you said a chemical weapon used by Russia would trigger a response in kind —

BIDEN: It will trigger a significant response.

DOOCY: — what does that mean?

BIDEN: I'm not going to tell you. Why would I tell you? You gotta be silly.

DOOCY: The world wants to know.

BIDEN: The world wants to know a lot of things. I'm not telling them what the response would be. Then, Russia knows the response. Alright, I'm going to take two more questions. One, two.

LISA DEJARDINS: Mr. President, thank you. I still want to get back to your original words that he cannot remain in power. Can you help us understand? You have more foreign policy experience than any president who has ever held this office. Whether those are your personal feelings or your feelings as president, do you understand why people would believe you, as someone commanding one of the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, saying someone cannot stay in power is a statement of U.S. policy and, also, are you concerned about propaganda use of those remarks by the Russians?

BIDEN: No and no.

DEJARDINS: Tell me why. You have so much experience. You are the leader of this country.

BIDEN: Because it's ridiculous. Nobody believes we're going to — I was thinking about taking down Putin. Nobody would — believes that, number one. Number two, what have I been talking about since this all began? The only war that's worse than one intended is the one unintended. Last thing I want is a land war or a nuclear war with Russia. That's not part of it. I was expressed my outrage at the behavior of this man. It's outrageous. It's outrageous. And it's more an aspiration of anything that he shouldn't be in power. There's no — I mean, people like this shouldn't be ruling countries, but they do. The fact they do — but don't mean I can't express my outrage about it. Last question.

MARY BRUCE: Mr. President, thank you. You said that you're confident that your comment won't undermine diplomatic efforts. But just to be clear, are you confident that Vladimir Putin sees that way, that he will not use this as an escalatory —

BIDEN: Well, I don't care what he thinks. Look, here's the deal. He's going to do what he's going to do. Putin, look —

BRUCE; But you're not concerned that he may see your language and view that as a sign of a reason for escalation — use that as an excuse to escalate given his recent behavior?

BIDEN: Given his recent behavior, you should — excuse me, I shouldn't say that to you — people shouldn't understand that he is going to do what he thinks he should do, period. He's not affected by anybody else, including, unfortunately, apparently, his own advisers. This is a guy that goes to the beat of his own drummer. And the idea that he is going to do something outrageous because I called him for what he is and what he's doing, I think, is — is just not rationale.

COLLINS: You didn't say whether you would meet with him again? Would you meet President Putin ever again?

BIDEN: It depends — no, it's not a question of — the question is is there something to meet on that would justify him being able to end this war and rebuild Ukraine?

COLLINS: So there is a — [INAUDIBLE]

BIDEN: That's the issue.

ED O'KEEFE: May I ask you about the Supreme Court, sir?

COLLINS: Could you just — quick — sorry, can you just say yes or no, Mr. President, whether or not you would be willing to meet with President Putin again?

BIDEN: It depends on what he wants to talk about.

COLLINS: Thank you.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS AIDE: Okay, last question.

O'KEEFE: What if he wanted to talk about negotiations. What if he wanted —

BIDEN: Now, look, you said Supreme Court. Don't play me, okay.

[ROOM LAUGHS]

O'KEEFE: You can't leave that hanging. Just real quick. Two matters on the Supreme Court. While you were away, there were reports about the wife of Justice Thomas and texts that she had with former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows. Should Justice Thomas recuse himself from any cases involving the January 6 insurrection of former President Trump at this point?

BIDEN: I'd leave that to two entities.

O'KEEFE: And on — okay, go ahead.

BIDEN: Go ahead. No, ask the second question.

O'KEEFE: No, two entities. Go ahead. Sorry.

BIDEN: One, the January 6 committee and, two, the Justice Department. That's their judgement, not mine to make.

O'KEEFE: So, on Justice Thomas recusing, you don't think he should or —

BIDEN: I'm not — I said that — I told you those things get into legal issues that, in fact, I told you I would not tell the justice Department what position to take or not take and I'm not going to instruct the Congress either.

O'KEEFE: Did you get any chance to watch much of the Judiciary Committee hearings last week?

BIDEN: I didn't see any of it, unfortunately.

O'KEEFE: The fact that Republicans were questioning judge Jackson on matters like former sentences related to child pornography cases or the definition of a woman, does that, as the former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, make sense to you?

BIDEN: Look, this is one of the most qualified nominees ever nominated for the Supreme Court in every respect in terms of her disposition, her intellectual capacity, her experience and background, and serving on two — three additional; courts. A woman who is totally thoroughly qualified. Totally thoroughly qualified and will be a great addition to the court, in my view.