

White House press briefing [via ABC News Live subfeed]

04/02/24

1:56:00 p.m.

2 minutes and 42 seconds

SELINA WANG: On the death of those World Central Kitchen aid workers, which includes one American who was killed. Netanyahu's reaction was, "it happens in war." What is your reaction to that comment from Netanyahu?

JOHN KIRBY: I don't think it'd be useful for me to get into a tick for tat here with the Prime Minister of Israel from the podium. We've been very clear about our expectations for this investigation. We noted that the prime minister said himself there will be an investigation. So has his military said that. We look forward to that investigation being thorough and — and swiftly done and, as I said, that — that it'll be transparent — the results of it and that, if there's accountability that needs to be had, that it will be had.

WANG: But how can you take Netanyahu at his word? As Nancy was saying, this was a deconflicted zone. They had marked their car. They had even coordinated their movements with the IDF.

KIRBY: Yeah, and, as I said in my opening statement, the — the — obviously, setting aside this incident, because this isn't the first one, there are issues of deconfliction that clearly need to be fleshed out and improved.

WANG: So how can the U.S. continue to send aid to Israel without any conditions? Yes, they have a right to defend —

KIRBY: We're not sending aid to Israel. We're sending aid into Gaza, and that's —

WANG: — no, weapons. How can they — how can the U.S. can continue to send military aid into Israel —

KIRBY: — oh, military assistance.

WANG: — without any conditions. Is there no red lines that could be crossed?

KIRBY: You know, we've had this — we've had this discussion, you and me, quite a bit from up here. Um, they're still under a viable threat of Hamas. Um, we're still going to make sure that they can defend themselves and the seventh of October doesn't happen again. That doesn't mean that it's a free pass that — that we — that we look the other way when something like this happens or that we aren't and haven't since the beginning of the conflict, urged the Israelis to be more precise, to be more careful and quite frankly, to increase the amount of humanitarian assistance that gets in. Um, you know, I haven't been asked about it yet, but I expected I would be. You know, there was a discussion just yesterday with our Israeli counterparts about Rafa. Now, this one was done virtually. We expect it'll be an in-person meeting here in a week's time

or so, but the whole reason to have that meeting was to talk about our concerns over a major ground operation in Rafah and to present viable alternatives for them to be more precise and more targeted. So, the idea that we're — we're — whistling past graveyard here, we're not paying attention to — to the civilian casualties or the civilian suffering is just not true.

WANG: Right, but these are verbal urgings — verbal commitments. There's no other incentives besides urging, to have discussions —

KIRBY: I — I know. You want us to — you want us to hang some sort of condition over their neck and what I'm telling you is that we continue to — to — to work with the Israelis to make sure that they are as precise as keep as they can be, and that more aid's getting in and — and we're going to continue to — to take that approach.

(...)

2:06:12 p.m.

6 minutes and 26 seconds

NIALL STANAGE: Just wanted to follow up with a question that came from the front row about the conditions of military aid and you said that the questioner wanted you to hang some conditions over their necks, that [of] the Israelis, and your tone suggested you wouldn't do that. Why not?

KIRBY: I've already answered this question a whole bunch of times. We believe that the approach that we're taking — um — is working in terms of making it clear to the Israelis what our expectations are. I'm not going to get ahead of decisions one way or another that we might take in the future. What I'm saying is, right now, we are continuing to support Israel because they continue to need military systems because they continue to face a viable threat.

STANAGE: But on the point of conditions, the President, on February 8, issued a memo and it said — you already know this, but just for context — it said that it was the policy of this administration to prevent arms transfers that risk facilitating or otherwise contributing to violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. Is firing a missile of people who live in food and killing them not a violation of international humanitarian law?

KIRBY: Well, the Israelis have already admitted that this was a mistake that they made. They're doing investigation. They'll get to the bottom of this. Let's not get ahead of that. Your — your question presumes, at this very early hour, that it was a deliberate strike, that they knew exactly what they were hitting, that they were hitting aid workers and did it on purpose and there's no evidence of that. I would also remind you, sir, that we continue to look at incidents as they occur. The State Department has a process in place and, to date as you and I are speaking, they have not found any incidents where the Israelis have violated international humanitarian law. And, lest you think we don't take it seriously, I can assure you that we do. We look at this in real time.

STANAGE: They have never violated international humanitarian law — ever — in the past five

to six months?

KIRBY: I'm telling you the State Department has looked at incidents in the past and has yet to determine that any of those incidents violate international humanitarian law.

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE [TO BILBASSY]: Go — go ahead, Nadia.

NADIA BILBASSY: Thank you, Karine. [TO KIRBY] “Mr Kirby, Israel killed a senior Hamas leader in Beirut with precision weapons in an area where thousands of civilians were there. They killed senior Iranian officials in Damascus — in the heart of Damascus where Syrians — there was thousands of civilians there as well. Um, does it make sense to you that a vehicle marked with World Central Kitchen, after coordinating with the Israelis, that they didn't see it? And doesn't this debunk your theory and defense of Israel that it is difficult for them because Hamas embedded with the civilian population where they can go after Hamas leaders in the heart of the civilian population in Beirut and in the Damascus?”

KIRBY: To your second question, no, it's not my theory. I have talked about — well, no, just hang on just a second now. I've talked about this for months now that fighting in an urban, high — highly populated, condensed environment like that's tough, but they have taken strikes against Hamas leaders in — successfully taken strikes against Hamas leaders in Gaza. I can't speak to what happened in Damascus — that — I can only tell you that the United States wasn't involved, so I'm not going to talk about the details of that whatsoever. I'm telling you that they have taken precise strikes against Hamas in Gaza. They have also taken strikes that have been not precise. It looks as if, very clearly, what happened yesterday is one of those examples. They'll investigate that and our expectation is and we've made this clear to them that they'll come clean about what they've learned. They'll be fully transparent and if people need to be held accountable, that will be held accountable.

JEAN-PIERRE [TO DOOCY]: Go ahead.

PETER DOOCY: Thank you. [TO KIRBY] John, there's another case of somebody who was in this country illegally allegedly murdering the young woman, this time in Michigan. Her name was Ruby Garcia. Donald Trump is out there now calling this Biden's border bloodbath. What do you call it?

KIRBY: Well, first of all — uh — while I'm not aware of this — the specifics of this case. I mean, that's just terrible news and our thoughts and prayers obviously go to the family of Miss Garcia. I mean, that's — that's kind of news no family ever wants to get ever — um, and we would certainly defer to local law enforcement and investigative bodies to do the — do the spadework that needs to be done to figure out exactly what happened to — to Ruby and to hold the perpetrators accountable for that. So why don't we let the judicial process play out here before we start making grandiose bumper sticker comments about what this says about the border and, Peter, to folks that are concerned about border security, the President will be the first one to stand up here and say he agrees the border does need some security capabilities, that we do need more Border Patrol agents, and all that has to happen is for the Speaker to do his job. Put that

supplemental on the floor. Let's get a vote. Let's get those 1,300 additional Border Patrol agents down there to do their jobs.

DOOCY: But everybody in this room knows that the bill that you guys keep talking about as a solution is dead at the moment and —

KIRBY: Says you. Doesn't need to be dead, does it?

DOOCY: — the bill's dead.

KIRBY: Says you!

DOOCY: When's the vote?

KIRBY: You — you ask Speaker Johnson that.

DOOCY: The bill's —

KIRBY: It doesn't need to be dead, Peter.

DOOCY:— there are — there are real problems at the border while that bill just languishes, right? The — the chief of the Border Patrol is saying —

KIRBY: Exactly.

DOOCY:— 140,000 gottaways, “if we don't know who is coming into our country and we don't know what their intent is, that is a threat.” Does President Biden agree?

KIRBY: The President absolutely believes that, along that border, we do have significant national security concerns that have to be met, but you said something really good in your question that I loved that while this — while these concerns are going on, the bill languishes. So, what's needed? It's not — it's not anything more from the President. What's needed is for Speaker Johnson to do his job and get that thing on the floor.

DOOCY: The President —

KIRBY: Let's get a vote on that. They had a chance and decided not to act because certain people in House Republican world wanted a problem rather than a solution.

DOOCY: — as the person in charge of presenting — preventing a terrorist attack in the homeland, does President Biden think that some of these border crossers could be in the United States right now plotting a terrorist attack against Americans?

KIRBY: The President's confident that — uh — throughout the interagency — DHS, intelligence community — that we're doing everything we can to be as vigilant as we can to ensure the safety

and security of the American people here at home.

(....)

2:14:09 p.m.

2 minutes and 14 seconds

ANDREW FEINBERG: John, you described — you described the strike as a possible mistake by Israel. According to Haaretz, the Israeli newspaper, it wasn't one strike, but three. The first one, then an interval during which aid workers got out of their vehicles, removed the wounded, tried to move to another vehicle, which was struck, and then a third strike — what — as they tried to move and escape in a third vehicle, at which point all of them were dead. How would the second and third strikes of these marked vehicles be a mistake? And why would the U.S. not more forcefully set conditions on the use of U.S.-made weaponry when it is being used to target aid workers? If the first one was a mistake, the second two were targeted with the intent of killing everyone in that convoy. So, how do you respond to that, sir?

KIRBY: First of all, there's an investigation going on, so why don't we let it get done and why don't we see what they find in terms of the decision making process that led to this terrible outcome? Prime Minister and the IDF have noted that it was their error. If you don't like the word mistake, their error. They're investigating it. Let 'em do that work and let 'em see what they come up with and then we'll go from there.

FEINBERG: Sorry, one — one more, John. Two years ago, the IDF killed an Al Jazeera journalist. They said that that was a — a mistake, that she was wearing a mark press vest. She was shot anyway in that.

KIRBY: They investigated it and they released the findings — their investigation which found that they were at fault. Go on.

FEINBERG: They did, but my — my question, sir, is — in that case, these Israelis did not initiate any criminal proceeding. In this case if it's found that marked convoy was deliberately targeted, if not with the first shot, but the second two shots, would the U.S. support criminal penalties?

KIRBY: As I said, we would expect that, should there be a need for accountability, that account — accountability be properly put in place for whoever may be responsible for this, but again, that's going to — a lot of that's gonna depend on the investigation.

(....)

2:21:32 p.m.

2 minutes and 58 seconds

JOSH BOAK: We discussed earlier former President Trump is describing the situation on the

border as a bloodbath, but on Friday, we're going to get jobs figures and past jobs reports have shown that immigrants are helping the U.S. economy. Is the view of this administration that the inflow of immigrants do more to strengthen the United States or hurt the United States? Does it do more?

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: So, Josh, I appreciate that question, and I think it's an important question as we're hearing clearly awful rhetoric from the other side, so but what we know what this president believes and you've heard the President say this before is that we know immigrants strengthen our country and our economy as well. It goes hand-in-hand here. Think about the critical work eight immigrants — these eight immigrants were doing on Key Bridge when it collapsed — when it collapsed. While Congress failed to act on President Biden's comprehensive immigration reform — remember, he introduced that on the first day of his administration because he understood the importance of fixing — fixing immigration — a system that had been broken — that has been broken for decades, his administration has led the largest expansion of lawful immigration pathways in decades and we continue — we continue to work ensure employers and immigrants can effectively navigate the laws in place. And so, reforming our immigration system only strengthens our economy. You hear the president talking about that, about making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, making sure that this dignity and respect for everyone and so — and by doing that, it boosts our labor supply, it helps solve workforce shortages — and — some businesses are facing — right — that we see businesses are facing and so, we took a step forward not too long ago. We spent two months working with the Senate, working with Republicans and Democrats to try and figure out how do we deal with this broken system. We saw they — we put together what would have been, if put into law, the toughest and fairest piece of legislation that we have seen in some time. But what we heard from the last — last administration from President Trump and you heard me say this over and over again — you all reported this — that he told Republicans to reject that proposal because it would hurt him and help the President. That's not how this President sees this. This President sees the immigration system as a — as an issue that majority of Americans care about and that we should fix. We should get to the bottom of this, so we're going to continue to urge Congress, Republicans to come back — right — get — come back to the table, move forward with that proposal, get it out of the Senate and then move it over to the south — the House, get it out of the House, put it in front of the — in front of the President, he will sign it — the toughest and fairest law that we have seen in some time. And this is not about politics for this President and to just — to go back to the beginning of answering your question, we know immigrants, strengthen our country and also strengthen our economy.

(...)

2:33:03 p.m.

4 minutes and 35 seconds

NANCY CORDES: Going back to the bloodbath question, the former President used that terminology a week or two ago, but is talking about it again today. What's the White House reaction to the use of that term bloodbath?

JEAN-PIERRE: I'm going to be really mindful here because it is — president — the — the — obviously, the former president is also a candidate here, so wanna follow the law with the Hatch Act — but we have to denounce our responses. We have to denounce any — any violent rhetoric that we hear, certainly from our leaders — right — that tears our country apart. It could tear up our country apart and puts our fellow Americans in harm's way — in danger, so we have to denounce that. And look, you know, I think and we think that the American people wants [sic] to see the country coming together. that's what they want. They want to — they want to make sure that we respect our democracy. They want to make sure that we respect the rule of law. That's what they want. And so, that is what the President's going to continue to fight for. I — we're going to any type of violent rhetoric, we're going to denounce that. It doesn't matter who it comes from. We're going to denounce it.

CORDES: Does the White House believe that there is a bloodbath taking place or a wave of migrant crime?

JEAN-PIERRE: Look — um — we've been very clear about — I just laid out to Josh, when it comes to immigrants, how important they are to the fabric of this country, how important they are to the strength of this country, to our economy, and that continues to — to be true, right? That's something that this President believes, and we've always called out any — if there is any form of — of violence that — that could be caused by one person — right — that we may have seen, we call that out as well — and — and that is always important to do. But, in this instance, it is used to — in the way that this violent rhetoric is being used, it is being used to tear our country apart. That's how it's being used, and we have to — we can't allow that, right? This is not what Americans want to see. Americans want to see us bringing the country together and — and so, that form of rhetoric it is. It's not helpful to us, so we're going to continue to call that out, and we're going to be very, very clear about that. But this — you know, if — if a violent act is — it happens, as we have seen — um and someone is killed, we want to make sure that — that You know, we've got to condemn that and want to make sure that the law comes into place and we let the law enforcement on the ground deal with that, but to denounce entire community, we can't allow that. We have to denounce that any type of violent rhetoric. [TO UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER, NOT DOOCY] Go ahead.

DOOCY: Karine, just a quick point of clarification, Karine. So, when Donald Trump is talking about a bloodbath, it is violent rhetoric. What was it when Joe Biden said in 2020, we — “what we can't let happen is let this primary become a negative bloodbath”?

JEAN-PIERRE: So, I'm going to be really mindful and careful about Donald Trump, but if you read — because he is a — he is a candidate — we're talking about the 2024 election. You should read — hit — what he said in its context, so you got to read what he said in context.

DOOCY: [Inaudible]. Bloodbath is an ugly word —

JEAN-PIERRE: We got —

DOOCY: — when Trump uses it. What is it —

JEAN-PIERRE: — it's not —

DOOCY: — when Biden uses it?

JEAN-PIERRE: No, no, no. Let's be very clear. You gotta — actually — asked me the question in context of what it was said — right — and what the — what it was said when he said that — right — in his remarks in his speech, right? And so, that's being disingenuous in your question.

DOOCY: I'm reading a direct quote from Joe Biden. "What we can't let happen is let this primary become a negative bloodbath."

JEAN-PIERRE: He's talking about — he was talking about a group of people — a group of people. That's what he's talking about. What the President was talking about during the primary was not to allow it to be — the words — and — and the primary and that election to become negative. Two different — two different things.

DOOCY: Okay!

JEAN-PIERRE: They're not the same. They're not the same — and your question is disingenuous. And so, look, I'm going to be really mindful here. I've got to be really careful. We have to denounce violent rhetoric, which — wherever it comes from — a former leader, we have to denounce that because we saw what happened on January 6. We saw what happened there — when you have a mob of 2,000 people go to the Capitol because they didn't believe in free — the free and fair election that just happened months prior because of violent rhetoric. You got to denounce that. That's not what leaders should be doing.