

White House press briefing [via ABC News Live subfeed]

04/04/24

2:41:47 p.m.

3 minutes and 46 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Did the CIA warn Israel or did President Biden warn Netanyahu today about an Iranian plan to attack inside Israel within 48 hours?

JOHN KIRBY: I'm not going to talk about intelligence matters, Peter. I think you can understand. Um, but, um, they didn't talk about a very public and very viable real threat by Iran to Israel's security, and I think I need to leave it at that. It's really as far as I can go.

DOOCY: On October 7, President Biden said, "my administration's support for Israel's security is rock solid and unwavering." That is not true anymore, correct?

KIRBY: That — no, it is true.

DOOCY: It —

KIRBY: Still true today.

DOOCY: — how support unwavering, but you're also reconsidering policy choices?

KIRBY: Both can be true.

DOOCY: They cannot be true. They're — they're completely different things.

KIRBY: No, no, no. I just —

DOOCY: He is —

KIRBY: — I'm sorry.

DOOCY: — he is wavering.

KIRBY: Ah, now, now, now. Come on, Peter. Get out.

DOOCY: How is he not?

[REPORTERS LAUGH]

KIRBY: Ah, come on. Come on now. As I said, and as it says in that readout, we made clear and — and he made it clear to the prime minister in his call that our support for Israel's self defense remains ironclad. They face a range of threats, and the United States isn't going to walk away from helping Israel defending itself. That said, you can say all that and you can act on that and

you can believe that and the President does and still believe that the manner in which they're defending themselves against the Hamas threat needs to change and that is the conversation that we had today. But both things are true. Our support is ironclad and consistent. It's not going to — not going to stop. It's not gonna — not gonna — not gonna waiver but — will, there perhaps be some policy changes we might have to make if we don't see policy changes out of Israel? Yes.

DOOCY: How is that unwavering? It sounds like you guys are trying to have it both ways here.

KIRBY: No, I don't know that I can —

DOOCY: You support Israel —

UNIDENTIFIED REPORTER OR WHITE HOUSE STAFFER: Peter!

DOOCY: — but we are going to make all these changes because we don't support Israel?

KIRBY: — I didn't say we're going to make changes. I said, we need to see how Israel's responds to the humanitarian crises in Gaza and how they respond to protection of aid workers. I think we can all agree. I think you would agree. You don't want to see innocent civilians killed and targeted, do you? You don't want to see Gazans starve. You don't want to see famine in Gaza, do you?

DOOCY: Nobody wants —

KIRBY: Of course not.

DOOCY: — to see that, but —

KIRBY: So —

DOOCY: — you're a policy maker and you're talking about policy changes.

KIRBY: — so —

DOOCY: That is not what you were talking about on October 7 —

KIRBY: — because things have —

DOOCY: — when it was solid and unwavering.

KIRBY: — on October 7, there wasn't near famine in Gaza. On October 7, there wasn't, um, a diminution of trucks getting into Gaza. On October 7, we didn't see thousands and thousands of innocent people killed. Uh, I mean, I could go on and on. We're talking about a conflict there which is dang near at six months here this weekend, six months, and it has changed over time and the — what the President's message today was we need to see some changes in the way

Israel is dealing with that threat.

DOOCY: And —

KIRBY: That's — that's what two good friends and allies can discuss. This isn't about un — this isn't about changing our support to Israel or the security of the Israeli state, and I — I just have to take issue with the premise of the question.

DOOCY: Okay. Just the last one then. Where is President Biden on any of this? When he wants to talk about how angry he is or frustrated he is about the high cost of insulin, he comes out and gives an impassioned speech. Where is he on any of this?

KIRBY: He's been talking about this. He's been issuing statements on this.

DOOCY: In private!

KIRBY: No, that statement, last I looked, was public.

DOOCY: Where is he? Why isn't he here, right now?

KIRBY: I'm sure you'll continue to hear from the president about this, and many other national security issues.

(...)

2:46:48 p.m.

1 minute and 5 seconds

S.V. DÁTE: Admiral, could you clarify on the — the — the ceasefire language that the President used the statement? He says that, uh, that there should be a ceasefire, um, and then the next — after a comma, it's "he urged Prime Minister to empower negotiators to conclude a deal without delay." So, are the two tied together or is he saying cease fire right now and then [a deal to return the hostages] later? I mean, what —

KIRBY: We — we —

DÁTE: How immediate is immediate?

KIRBY: — I — I can't really improve upon the President's language. We want to see a pause in the fighting. We want to see a ceasefire immediately, so that we can get more humanitarian assistance in and create a set of conditions where aid organizations feel better about operating inside Gaza because, as we've — we've already seen it in — as a result of the attack on the WCK workers that some aid organizations now are pulling back. So, we want to see that immediate ceasefire in place. We also of course, as we've said many times, I think that — that could also provide a window here to get the hostages out.

(....)

3:01:39 p.m.

2 minutes and 32 seconds

GRADY TRIMBLE: Ford said today it's delaying production on an electric SUV. Tesla, earlier this week, said its sales are plunging. Do these types of developments make the administration rethink their EV policy?

JEAN-PIERRE: No, not at all. Look, you know, when it comes to EV sales, there are reaching record highs. EVs are more affordable than ever and that's because of the work that this administration has done. Last year, EV sales surpassed one million for the first time ever. That's a 50 percent increase. That matters. Under President Biden, EV sales have more than quadrupled. Sales of hybrids and EVs are now a record high of 18 percent of all light-duty vehicle sales. Average price of an EV is down 20 percent from just a year ago, just one year ago. So, we believe that this is part of what — I should say, the President has always said that he wants to make sure we do everything that we can to lower cost, lower prices. This is part of that and also do — it — off — everything that we can to deal with climate crisis and this is part of that.

TRIMBLE: So, is it realistic to go from about seven or eight percent of sales to 50 percent of sales in eight years if the automakers themselves are cutting back production — on production?

JEAN-PIERRE: We believe — and we've seen that — that U.S. manufacturing jobs have increased. Jobs have indeed increase [sic] and when you see a boom like this, that means you need auto workers, right? It can't happen on its own. And so we, uh, we believe this is working. We believe this is part of what the President has promised and we want to see a manufacturing industry that's for the future of this — of this country, and that's what we're seeing. And that's what the President's working towards.

TRIMBLE: And a question about yesterday's call with President Xi. If President Biden is concerned enough about TikTok to bring it up on a call with the president of China, why is he and why is the Vice President — why are they still making videos for TikTok?

JEAN-PIERRE: Eh, that's coming out of the campaign, so I would refer you to the —

TRIMBLE: But they're in the videos.

JEAN-PIERRE: — wait, wait, that's — I understand. It is the campaign's decision. I would refer you to the campaign. We have been very clear. We are not trying to ban TikTok. We're not trying to ban TikTok. We're talking about a divestment. You heard that from the national security adviser when he's been here a couple of times at the podium, speaking to TikTok and the legislation and how we're trying to move forward. It is a — it is a platform that we really need to take seriously here. We're talking about our national security and so, we've talked about not banning, divesting. Not banning, divesting, So we want to be very clear about that.

(....)

3:07:30 p.m.

4 minutes and 16 seconds

STEVEN NELSON: I'd like to ask you about press freedom, and then about a significant White House personnel matter. About press freedom —

JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah?

NELSON: — our government appears to be closer to potentially extraditing Julian Assange. Press freedom groups say this case threatens to criminalize or professional, so I'm wondering what the White House is thinking is regarding that matter and potential threat to press freedom. Does the White House have a stance on the depending federal press shield legislation that passed the House and that Senator Schumer told me he hopes reaches President Biden's desk here?

JEAN-PIERRE: You're talking about the press acts —

NELSON: Yes.

JEAN-PIERRE: — more specifically? Look, and I said this — I said this many times — I said this last week where journalism is not a crime. We've been very clear about that. Uh, and as it relates to this particular legislation, I haven't reviewed. It would have to talk to our Office of Leg Affairs on that particular legislation. But I do want to say, back in October of 2022, the Justice Department codified a policy to ban subpoenas of journalist records. The President strongly supports the right of free and independent press. That is something that the President talked about when he was at the Gridiron. The president talked about this at the last White House Correspondents Dinner. He has been very consistent about this, and I'll just quote him for a second: "A free press is a pillar of any free society and while we may not always agree with certain coverage or admire it, we do admire the courage of the free press." Journalism, again, is not a crime.

NELSON: Before moving on, just to confirm, no stance yet on the Press Act that you're aware of? And the Assange matter, is there concerned about that?

JEAN-PIERRE: Ah. You know, I don't have much more to share besides what I just laid out here, so I would just leave it as what I just stated to you.

BRIAN KAREM: In prison. And it's five years.

JEAN-PIERRE: I understand. I hear — I hear — I heard the question. I'm just not going to go beyond from what I just stated

NELSON: And, on the personal matter. I'd like to ask you about my reporting on Anthony Bernal, who is one of the most powerful figures in this White House. The First Lady reportedly

refers to her work husband. Three former colleagues have made allegations of sexual harassment against him, building on prior reports of bullying. Some of these sources have worked with you. I think you'd find them credible. But Chief of Staff Zients issued a statement dismissing the allegations as "unfounded attacks" without even investigating them, which my sources say they're alarmed about because they say it could chill sexual harassment and bullying reports. How can the White House potentially — or possibly justify not investig — investigate these allegations when the President says you'll fire people —

JEAN-PIERRE: So, couple things. I don't know who your sources are, so I can't — I — just with all due respect, I can't speak to that, right? I — I just don't. I mean, they're blind sources. I can't speak to that. What I can speak to is you saw a statement from our Chief of Staff, Jeffrey Zients, saying they are unfounded. You saw a very strong statement from Anthony himself. It was in your — obviously — in your reporting, and he said the same and I cannot speak to personnel investigations here or anything like that. That is not something I will ever speak to and I'm not saying there is one. I'm just saying that I will never cannot speak to them. That's not something I can do, but — hold on. I have known Anthony for some time now. I've known him for more than a decade. I've worked closely with him and I consider him a friend, but also a colleague that I respect and that's basically what you also heard from Jeffrey Zients. I just don't have anything else to share beyond your reporting. I — I'm —

NELSON: — I just gotta press you on this —

JEAN-PIERRE: No, wha — no.

NELSON: — because the President —

JEAN-PIERRE: I — I don't —

NELSON: — said he would fire people for —

JEAN-PIERRE: — I don't have anything —

NELSON: — disrespecting colleagues and there's no investigation.

JEAN-PIERRE: — but — I just laid — I just said to you that they have said themselves — Jeffrey Zients and also Anthony Bernal — that they are unfounded. I can't speak to your sources. Those are your sources to speak to. I cannot.

NELSON: But does [inaudible] special —

JEAN-PIERRE: No.

NELSON: — status come from the First Lady shielding him —

JEAN-PIERRE: Steve!

NELSON: — as some sources believe?

JEAN-PIERRE: Steven, I've answered the question. I've answered the question. Bernard [sic] — Anthony Bernal spoke for himself. You heard from our chief of staff — our chief of staff — and gave your publication a statement, obviously. And you've heard from me. I — I'm — I don't have it.

NELSON: Is that going to have a chilling —

JEAN-PIERRE: I don't —

NELSON: — effect, though, on people who suffer —

JEAN-PIERRE: I don't have anything else —

NELSON: — sexual harassments or bullying.

JEAN-PIERRE:— to share. I don't have anything else to share on that.