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U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE




Department Press Briefing – 25 February, 2022

NED PRICE, DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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2:35 p.m. EST

MR PRICE: Good afternoon.

QUESTION: Good afternoon.

MR PRICE: Hello. My apologies for the delay. We actually intended to start early today; we are now starting late. I report to higher authorities, as we all do.

I'd like to start by saying this: The American people are standing with the people of Ukraine as they suffer an unjustified, unprovoked, and premeditated attack by Russia's military forces. It's a brutal attack. It's a brutal attack that is endangering the lives and livelihoods of millions of civilians. We will not falter in our resolute support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

This is a dangerous moment for Europe and really for freedom-loving people everywhere. Putin's assault on Ukraine is an attack on the principles that undergird global peace, stability, and security the world over.

But Putin didn't account for everything, and he didn't account for the bravery and resolve of

but Putin didn't account for everything, and he didn't account for the bravery and resolve of the people of Ukraine. We commend the Ukrainian people for showing strength and determination in response to an unprovoked attack by the Kremlin. We have seen Ukrainian soldiers demonstrate incredible bravery in the first day of self-defense: shooting down Russian aircraft, firing at tanks, and holding many of the positions while under violent assault.

The Kremlin continues to use disinformation, including false reports alleging – again, falsely – the widespread surrender of Ukrainian troops. Moscow is resorting to outright lies in an effort to weaken the resolve of Ukraine's military and of its people. We also are witting of reports that the Russian Federation plans to threaten to kill the family members of Ukrainian soldiers if they do not surrender. These tactics are classic intimidation; they are synonymous with the Kremlin; they are unacceptable.

This isn't the first time, of course, Putin has decided that his country can attack another country with impunity.

Moscow's further invasion of Ukraine is part of a pattern of the Kremlin's destructive behavior. The Russian Federation, of course, invaded Georgia in 2008. It continues to occupy territories within Georgia's borders, and for decades it has stationed troops in Moldova without host government consent.

Tomorrow, the United States will join Ukraine in solemnly marking the eighth anniversary of Russia's 2014 invasion and brutal occupation of Crimea – a flagrant disregard for international law as well as Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The United States reaffirms, as we always have: Crimea is Ukraine.

The Ukrainian people have known 30 years of independence, and while building their democracy they have shown relentless and inspiring pursuit of liberty, of peace, of security, of human dignity, and they continue to show that they will not go back in time.

As we approach the seventh anniversary of the brutal murder of Boris Nemtsov, we are reminded that many Russians disagree with Putin's brutal and imperialist tactics and policies. The citizens of Russia who are peacefully protesting, including in Putin's own hometown and in dozens of other cities across the Russian Federation, are rejecting his violence against the people of Ukraine. We deeply respect them. We respect their bravery; we respect their heroism. They are out in the streets demanding that Russia's government their government

...persists. They are out in the streets demanding that Russia's government, their government, stop this unprovoked and unjustified war. We've seen leading Russian journalists denouncing Putin's war of choice. We have heard of Russia's mothers concerned about the reckless deployment of their sons to a needless war.

These courageous people of conscience in Russia persist. They persist despite the Kremlin's reinvigorated crackdown. This too is classic from Putin's playbook. Whenever challenged by people, his own people speaking truth and opposing views, his tactic is to silence them.

The people of Russia, as we have said time and again, are not our enemy. We hold President Putin and his cronies responsible for this war, not them. We join you in saying, "No to war," "нет войне" (Cyrillic).

President Biden has said from the start of this crisis if Putin chooses to invade, the cost to Russia will be immediate and profound – to its financial system, to its economy, to its technological base, and to its strategic position and ambitions, as well as its reputation in the world.

And the world has now witnessed that Putin has made a choice. He rejected diplomacy. He has chosen war. And President Biden has announced our response.

To be clear: This is not the outcome we wanted. This is not the outcome we sought to prevent. It's both a tragedy for the people of Ukraine and a choice Putin made that he – that he has decided for the people of Russia. This is a choice that has been decided for them, not by them. Putin's war of choice has required that we follow through on imposing the massive consequences and severe costs, and that we ensure his flagrant violation of international law will be a strategic failure. We stand united with our NATO Allies and partners in Europe and around the world in confronting the Russian Government and holding President Putin and those around him to account.

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned. I just wanted – I think you might have misspoken. This is the outcome you sought to prevent, right?

MR PRICE: This is the outcome that we sought to prevent.

QUESTION: Okay. Can I ask you – this may be already kind of OBE, but there was this proposal

the Chinese – Chinese proposal the Russians seem to have picked up on, at least for an hour or so, about talks between Russia and Ukraine happening in Minsk. I know the Secretary spoke to Foreign Minister Kuleba today. What's the U.S. – what's your thinking about the efficacy of such a – of such talks?

MR PRICE: Well, Matt, you've heard us say before that over the course of several weeks leading up to the events that we've seen recently in Ukraine – the assault on Ukraine, its sovereignty, its territorial integrity, and really its people – that Moscow engaged in a pretense of diplomacy. That was before the invasion started.

Now we see Moscow suggesting that diplomacy take place at the barrel of a gun or as Moscow's rockets, mortars, artillery target the Ukrainian people. This is not real diplomacy. Those are not the conditions for real diplomacy. We and our allies have called for a real diplomatic solution from day one. President Zelenskyy, for his part, has repeatedly reached out to President Putin, but his outstretched hand at every turn was met now by silence and now bombs.

If President Putin is serious about diplomacy, he knows what he can do. He should immediately stop the bombing campaign against civilians, order the withdrawal of his forces from Ukraine, and indicate very clearly, unambiguously to the world, that Moscow is prepared to de-escalate. We have not seen that yet.

QUESTION: So you don't think it's a good idea.

MR PRICE: We have not seen any indication that Putin is prepared to de-escalate. We have not seen any indication that he is willing to create the conditions in which diplomacy can succeed.

QUESTION: And just to put a superfine point on it, it is not the question of the – it is not a question of the venue. If the same talks – without some kind of significant change from the Russians, you don't think talks anywhere would —

MR PRICE: This is a question that is much more fundamental than the venue. This is the question of whether diplomacy can succeed under these conditions. We do not think it can.

QUESTION: Okay. Then just secondly and finally from me, Finland and Sweden were invited to participate in this NATO meeting in Brussels earlier today, and the Russians have, I don't know,

participate in this NATO meeting in Brussels earlier today, and the Russians have, I don't know, issued a warning, saying that if they were to join NATO – and I know that there isn't any current plan for them to do so, but if they were that there would be repercussions, military and political repercussions for them.

Now, I'm not going to ask you whether the U.S. would encourage or support Finland or Sweden to join NATO, but there are conditions that have to be satisfied, or aspirants have to satisfy certain conditions to become members. Do Finland and Sweden currently, as they are now, meet those conditions for membership?

MR PRICE: That is a question, Matt, for NATO. But there is a more fundamental question that your question actually gets at, and that is really what is at stake in this conflict. We have made the point before that Ukraine is a valued partner of the United States. Its people are partners of the American people. But this in some ways, in many ways, is bigger than a territorial conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It is bigger because these are about the foundational principles that for 70 years now, since the end – over the course of two world wars and since the end of the Cold War – principles that have undergirded and really fueled unprecedented levels of stability, of prosperity, of security the world over – in Europe, Indo-Pacific, and everywhere in between. That is what Putin is threatening.

In addition to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, the people of Ukraine, the Government of Ukraine, what Putin is threatening are these – is this rules-based international order. And one of the central precepts of that rules-based international order is the foundational truth that every country should be free to determine its own policies – its own domestic policy, its own foreign policies, its partnerships, its alliances, its associations, its aspirations. That is what Putin has sought to trample on in Ukraine. It is what, if we are to listen to at least this bluster, we may be led to believe he wants to trample on beyond Ukraine.

QUESTION: Okay. I get that. That's not – my question is about Finland and Sweden. It's not about what Putin's policies are. Ukraine has made it very clear that it wants to – or the current government in Ukraine has made it very clear that it wants to join NATO, and NATO has said no, you're not ready yet. What my question is, is if – and I know you're not going to want to answer a hypothetical – but if you're going to say no, that – I mean, do Finland and Sweden meet the criteria for NATO membership?

MR PRICE: So first

MR PRICE: So —

QUESTION: Should they – should they apply tomorrow, would they have to – would – would they have to do – are they democratic enough?

MR PRICE: So —

QUESTION: Do they – do they uphold human rights? Do they —

MR PRICE: So let me make three points. It is up to Finland and Sweden to determine for themselves if they wish to join NATO or any other alliance. It is our firm position that – and a firm position of the NATO Alliance – that NATO’s door remains open to all eligible aspirants. And three, ultimately, if a country does apply, does aspire for NATO membership, that’s a decision for NATO, not for any other country.

QUESTION: Right, but I just want to know would the United States support – you don’t support Ukraine’s membership in NATO right now. But do you —

MR PRICE: Matt, you yourself have just said that neither Finland nor Sweden have indicated that they aspire to join NATO. So —

QUESTION: I know. Well, that’s why – that’s why I – I tried to couch the question whether they would currently meet the criteria to become members.

MR PRICE: I’m going to let Finland and Sweden speak for themselves.

QUESTION: All right.

MR PRICE: Yes, Vivian.

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned. The EU has agreed to impose sanctions on Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov today. The President said obviously it was under consideration yesterday. There are reports that the U.S. will announce sanctions on Putin today. Can you tell us if that is the case?

MR PRICE: As you heard from the President yesterday, all options are on the table. All options means all. All means all. We are looking closely at additional options that may apply

means all. All means all. We are looking closely at additional options that may apply appropriate pressure to the Russian Federation, to President Putin, to those around him. But any additional measures would join a litany of steps that, together with our EU allies, with Australia, with Canada, with Great Britain, with New Zealand, a number of other countries, we announced yesterday that constitute the strongest, most consequential set of sanctions and other economic measures ever imposed. And the fact that they are responsive to this brazen, brutal, unprovoked aggression on the part of Russia against Ukraine speaks to their strength and why that strength was and is necessary.

So any additional measures would complement the fact that we announced yesterday, that now all ten of Russia's largest bank, which hold 80 percent of the assets in Russia's banking sector, are now subject to these measures; the export controls that we have – the Department of Commerce, to be specific, imposed yesterday now block the import of some 50 percent of the strategic imports that Moscow would need for its strategic positioning, its strategic ambitions; the fact that the Russian Government is now cut off in terms of its sovereign debt from Western financing; the fact that elites around President Putin are now sanctioned and subject to those attendant restrictions. Any additional measures – and again, we have said that if President Putin continues to escalate, we will do the same. But any additional measures would join that long litany of steps that already constitute the strongest, the most decisive response that the United States, and together with our allies and partners, have ever mounted.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: So I have a couple of follow-ups on both of those issues. But before, please indulge me. *Foreign Policy* magazine first reported this, about locally employed staff working in Ukraine and how they're seeking U.S. help. So what is the plan for them? How many people are we talking about? And what is your assessment? Do you not think you have an obligation to these people?

MR PRICE: Humeyra, the Secretary and others from here have been in regular touch with the Embassy Kyiv community, and that of course includes our locally employed staff. You've traveled with us. You know the value that the Secretary, that the team around him, attach to our locally employed staff. They are at the heart of our embassy operations around the world. Quite simply, our embassies, our posts around the world, could not function without our

locally employed staff.

On February 24th, a couple of days ago, the locally employed staff committee sent us an email following Russia's unprovoked attack against Kyiv. We are exploring all legal options available to us that would enable us to support them at what clearly is a very difficult time for our locally employed staff.

We've already taken some important steps. We've implemented paid administrative leave for all staff unable to work or telework, regardless of their location. Whether our local staff are working, whether they're teleworking, whether they are unable to work, let me be clear: They are being paid. Whether they are in Ukraine or outside of Ukraine, they are being paid. We have established a dedicated communications channel for all of our locally employed staff to contact us with their questions, with their concerns, so that we can be responsive directly to them. And we've provided the option of salary advances to support those locally employed staff who need an extra amount of assistance at what is clearly a very difficult time.

So these relationships are deeply meaningful to us. They're deeply important to us. Again, our operations could not continue without our locally employed staff.

QUESTION: How many people are we talking about?

MR PRICE: I'm not in a position to offer that.

QUESTION: Four hundred? A hundred?

MR PRICE: All of them are being paid. All of them have these options available to them.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up on that?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Unless you want to go into something else, Humeyra.

QUESTION: Yeah, I was going to move on.

QUESTION: Can I just do one quick question on that?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Yeah, go ahead.

QUESTION: Okay. One thing that they asked for specifically in this letter was assistance relocating out of the country. The Biden administration has been talking about this potential assault for weeks now. So why isn't there already a way to help these locally employed staff get out of the country if they want to? And do you plan on doing that?

MR PRICE: Well, we are exploring all options that are legally available to us and that are logistically available to us at this time. As you know, we have for – over the course of weeks now been issuing public communications directed, in the first instance, at the American citizen community in Kyiv, those who otherwise would have traveled to Ukraine, urging individuals not to travel to Ukraine; and more recently urging Americans located in Ukraine to depart Ukraine. We have of course provided guidance to our locally engaged staff, locally employed staff who has come to us – who had come to us seeking guidance, seeking direction. So I can't speak to specific cases. I can't speak to specific decisions or choices that may have been made. But we are here to support them in every conceivable way that we can.

QUESTION: That raises actually the – sorry.

QUESTION: And is there any reason to believe they'd be specifically subject to Russian aggression?

MR PRICE: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Is there any reason to believe that these locally employed staff would be specifically subject to Russian aggressions?

MR PRICE: I have – I have not seen any indication that they would be targeted for their role, but we have seen every indication that this is intended to be, on the part of the Russian Federation, not only an assault on Ukraine's territorial integrity, not only an assault on its government, but also an assault on the Ukrainian people. So we are deeply concerned about

the intentions, the motivations of the Russian Federation. It's why we are seeking to bring this unprovoked, needless war to an end as quickly as we can.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: Just on this. Do you know, were there any local staff who accompanied the people who went to Lviv and were working in Lviv and who have since now been relocated basically to Poland, and who would have gone and are now, temporarily at least, being – living in Poland?

MR PRICE: It was a core embassy team, Matt, that —

QUESTION: Of just Americans or were there local staff too?

MR PRICE: It was a core embassy team. I'm not in a position to offer if there were any locally employed staff with them.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: Just to close the loop on sanctions and then I'll move on to UN very briefly. So the assessments out there about how long it would take Russian forces to overrun Kyiv is mentioned, like, in days. And yet the President and others in this government said yesterday sanctions would be more impactful in time. Is it fair to say, then, in the immediate term the U.S. is basically unable to stop Putin?

MR PRICE: I don't think you heard anyone say that. What you have heard us say is that – well, let me back up. Over the course of months now, we have been ringing the alarm bell, as we had information available to us as early as late last year that Vladimir Putin had these intentions. We started to see his forces mobilize around that time. You remember in November of 2021 when we first started to speak about this publicly. We – beyond our public messaging, we engaged in robust private diplomacy behind closed doors to ensure that our allies and partners around the world knew what we knew so that we could operate in tandem with one another.

When it comes to the sanctions that you mentioned, these were coordinated with allies and partners around the world. Part of what gives them the bite, the heft that they have is that these were not just measures that were introduced by the United States but also by the

these were not just measures that were introduced by the United States, but also by the European Union —

QUESTION: It doesn't matter how many people, how many countries introduced that. It's just – it's a matter of time, and we're talking about days, and president openly said that they don't have the days. But —

MR PRICE: But you will look – if you see what has transpired in the Russian marketplace, over the course not only of recent days but of recent weeks, the threat of these massive consequences have pushed the ruble to its lowest level in years, pushed the Russian stock market, pushed down investor sentiment, and have made clear that these measures have tremendous bite. And we saw that yesterday when these measures were introduced. So what is true is that these measures are designed to garner strength, to garner momentum over time, but with their immediate introduction yesterday on top of the measures that we imposed on Monday in response to President Putin's recognition of these so-called republics in eastern Ukraine, you have seen that there has been an immediate effect, there has been an immediate bite.

QUESTION: My final one is on UN. The vote is delayed for an hour. Do you know why?

MR PRICE: I do not. You would need to ask the UN.

QUESTION: Are you confident you've got UAE and India to say – to vote yes?

MR PRICE: We are confident that the Russian Federation will be and will be shown to be isolated on the world stage. We are confident that our partners, that our allies around the world will stand in very clear, very stark opposition to this aggression, to this assault on Ukraine's territorial integrity, to its independence, to its sovereignty. We have every expectation that message will emanate loud and clear from this UN session.

QUESTION: All your partners, including India and UAE?

MR PRICE: We have every expectation that message will be loud and clear to the Russian Federation, unambiguous to President Putin.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on something that you said when you were speaking with Matt? You said if you were listen to the blunder of President Putin, you might believe he was willing to go beyond Ukraine. Do you have reason to believe that that is the case?

MR PRICE: President Putin knows, because we have stated very clearly that our commitment to NATO – NATO’s Article 5, an attack on one is an attack on all – is as vibrant, is as sacrosanct as it was at NATO’s founding some seven decades ago. You heard the President say again yesterday that we will fight for every inch of NATO territory. That is a message that we have made very clear in public. It is a message that we have conveyed very clearly in private. I have no doubt that that message has reached President Putin.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: And one separate question? Oh, if you want to do a follow-up.

QUESTION: (Inaudible), thank you. But is there anything specific to indicate – the NATO secretary general said today that there are indications that the Kremlin’s objectives spanned beyond Ukraine. Is there anything to suggest from the U.S.’s perspective that they do?

MR PRICE: Well, what we have seen from President Putin, not only in recent days but in recent years, is his desire to go back to an era that has long since passed, an era in which spheres of influence are acceptable, an era in which large countries can bully small countries, an era in which might equals right. That is an era that should have ended, certainly with the fall of the Berlin wall, certainly with the end of the Cold War, but of course, President Putin has other desires, other aspirations. It is our task to reinforce the rules that have, again, governed the international community over the course of some 70 years, but certainly in more recent years since the end of the Cold War.

Abigail.

QUESTION: Can you give us any update on your efforts to help Americans who are still in – who are still in Ukraine? I know you are always hesitant to give exact numbers, but do you have any further indication of how many Americans have crossed over the border into Poland, for instance?

MR PRICE: So as you've heard us say, we don't have precise figures in any country around the world of the number of Americans who are present in a foreign country at any given time, and you know those reasons well. We don't track Americans, we don't require them to register, we don't require them to unregister when they leave a country.

In the case of Ukraine, however, we did have an estimate and we do have an estimate dated from October of last year of Americans resident in Ukraine. At the time, October of 2021, there were 6,600 Americans resident in Ukraine by our estimation. And that estimation was based on data from our Ukrainian partners. It was based on data that was available to us as well, including data from local organizations.

That same month, October of 2021, is the very same month that we started warning Americans not to travel to Ukraine. It was – those warnings were later superseded by clear and consistent encouragement to Americans to leave the country, and most recently warnings that Americans should leave the country. So since October of 2021, we have seen a sweeping shift in the advice and guidance we have provided to Americans who either sought to travel to Ukraine or Americans who might have been resident in Ukraine. So while we don't have a firm number of Americans who are there, we have good reason to believe – and I think all of you have good reason to conclude – that the number of Americans in Ukraine now is far lower than 6,600.

What we have been doing over the course of weeks now is communicating with Americans who are located in Ukraine, asking them to be in touch with us, providing us their contact information so that we in turn can provide them specific, tailored guidance about what they should do to depart the country. We have done so in the context of commercial air travel when that was available, and now more recently we've provided specific, consistent guidance on how Americans can travel overland to leave the country, including offering them specific advice as to which border crossings to go to so that they can travel from Ukraine into Poland with ease.

We've conducted diplomacy with our Polish allies to make sure that Americans need not provide any sort of advance notice when they seek to travel from Ukraine into Poland. We've set up a welcome center on the Polish side of the border with representatives of the State Department there to offer them any advice, any forms, any guidance they may need to complete their onward travel. So we've been in regular, consistent touch with Americans who

complete their onward travel. So we've seen irregular, consistent travel with Americans who are in Ukraine and Americans who have made that travel into Poland.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Ned, if I may, I'd like to follow on sanctions. So you mentioned those additional measures means additional sanctions, but what might be the trigger? What might trigger them? So what else are you waiting from Moscow? Moscow is bombing Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. I have the moral right to tell about this and not speculating because my family spent this night in the shelter. So what might – what else might happened and to just push administration to apply the additional sanctions?

And secondly, if I may, there are a lot of talks in Ukraine about the possibility of some kind of talks with the Russians. President Zelenskyy told about this in his statement that maybe America and United Kingdom may backing Ukraine in those conversations. So what's your message to Ukraine? Do you think that it's necessary right now or it's the wrong way? Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thank you. So we do believe that diplomacy is the only responsible way to address this. That was our belief prior to the start of the Russian invasion; it is our belief now that the Russian invasion and assault on Ukraine has begun. At the same time, we want to see diplomacy conducted in a context, in an environment, in which it can succeed. Our concern had been prior to the Russian invasion that, again, Moscow was using the so-called pretense of diplomacy, pretending to take part in serious diplomatic discussions, having these staged, highly choreographed meetings of the National Security Council where President Putin would instruct his lieutenants to engage in diplomacy only as he continued to amass his forces.

Now we see offers of diplomacy at the barrel of a gun. We see these offers as tanks continue to roll across the border, as your fellow countrymen, your fellow countrywomen, remain subject to unimaginable levels of violence and brutality by the Russian Federation. We want to make clear to President Putin that diplomacy by the barrel of a gun – coercive diplomacy – is not something that we are going to take part in. It is not something that will bring an end to this conflict in a real, genuine, and sustainable way.

We do want to see diplomacy succeed. That is why we are doing everything we can through our public messaging, but in some ways much more importantly, through the measures we

have introduced over the past couple days, coercive measures that are designed to contour President Putin's next moves, to put pressure on his economy, on his financial system, on those around him, and on President Putin himself so that we see de-escalation, we see diminution of violence, we see withdrawal of forces. We have not seen any of those things just yet, but these measures were just instituted and it is our sincere desire to see this going forward so that we can work diplomatically to bring an end to this senseless, unprovoked violence.

In terms of sanctions, as we've said, we have instituted the most biting, the most crippling, the most devastating set of sanctions together with our allies and partners that the world has ever seen. And we have additional measures that, if we do not see de-escalation, if we do not see a diminution in violence, that we are prepared to enact – again, together with our allies and partners.

Yes.

QUESTION: Following up on this, there was a memo sent around today to State Department employees calling for the cancellation of all government-to-government contacts with Russia unless it was a major national security interest topic, and those were listed. I'm just wondering what the goal of that approach is, what you guys think that does.

MR PRICE: The goal of – could you —

QUESTION: The goal of cutting off most of the contacts unless it's of a high national security interest topic.

MR PRICE: So again, Russia's actions, its needless, unprovoked, unnecessary, brutal campaign against Ukraine, has fundamentally changed the relationship that Moscow has not only with the United States but with countries around the world. The flavor, the look, the feel of our relationship with Moscow is very different today than it was last week or even a few days ago. At the same time, we have national security priorities, national security imperatives. And there may be some areas in which the fulfillment of our national security priorities and imperatives require us to engage, to coexist at some level, with the Russian Federation.

These are areas that are of overriding importance to us, and there are a few that come to

mind. But the point is that Moscow is now a pariah on the world stage. President Putin is a pariah on the world stage. His economy will suffer. His financial system will suffer. Moscow's strategic ambitions will suffer. Moscow's strategic positioning and strength will suffer. But again, we are always going to pursue what's in our national security interest, however we need to do that.

Yes, Paul.

QUESTION: Ned, you've spoken about the U.S. rejecting this idea of talks in Minsk. But the talks were offered with Ukraine, and I don't think Ukraine has stated its position. If I'm right, are you telling Ukraine you wouldn't stop – you wouldn't support them if they entered talks?

MR PRICE: We are a partner of the Ukrainian Government. We're a partner of the Ukrainian people. We will partner with them in real, constructive diplomacy, just as in our engagement with the Russian Federation, whether that was on a bilateral basis, whether it was through the NATO-Russia Council, whether it was through the OSCE. We incorporated the viewpoints, we incorporated the perspectives, we incorporated the interests of our Ukrainian partners into that.

So we are here to support our Ukrainian partners – not only diplomatically; that's important. We are supporting them with our security assistance, unprecedented levels of security assistance that will only continue to increase now that Putin has made this disastrous decision. Our support for Ukraine's economy – just last week the Secretary signed a fourth \$1 billion loan guarantee. We have continued through other means to provide stability to the Ukrainian economy, financial system, and through our humanitarian support. We provided \$52 million in humanitarian funding for the people of Ukraine last year. We will continue to provide significant levels of humanitarian support to the Ukrainian people this year.

Yes.

QUESTION: Following on that. So has the U.S. advised the Ukrainians against entering into any diplomatic talks with Moscow? And do you believe that that offer today was made in bad faith?

MR PRICE: On your second question, it is our belief that Moscow has sought to engage in the pretense of diplomacy. They clearly, it appears, attempted to do that prior to the invasion to

buy time, to continue their preparations for what, it now seems clear, Vladimir Putin had intended all along. I don't think it takes a grand geopolitical analyst to know that an offer of diplomacy as you rain down bombs, mortar shells, as your tanks advance towards a capital of 2.9 million people, as your forces encircle a capital, as your political leaders make demands of demilitarization, make demands of a fundamentally neutral foreign policy, essentially removing agency that Kyiv should otherwise have – that is not the context in which diplomacy can succeed.

I think it is fair to say that we see eye to eye with our Ukrainian partners on that front. President Biden, as you know, spoke to President Zelenskyy earlier today. Secretary Blinken, as you know, spoke to Foreign Minister Kuleba earlier today. We will continue to provide guidance, to share information with our Ukrainian partners. They in turn are continuing to provide updates to us, and we are ensuring that everything we do will be fully coordinated and that we'll be operating in pure lockstep.

QUESTION: President Zelenskyy said last night to Western interlocutors that it might be the last time that he's seen alive. Is the U.S. in any discussions with the Ukrainian Government about securing their safety? Are they moving them outside of the country or otherwise? Have the Ukrainians made such a request or the U.S. made such an offer?

MR PRICE: We are in constant discussion with our Ukrainian partners. Again, the President today; the Secretary today; the Secretary a couple of days ago spoke to Foreign Minister Kuleba; a couple days before that he spoke to Foreign Minister Kuleba. And that's only at the senior most levels. At working levels, we have been in regular contact with our Ukrainian partners about the challenges they're facing, about the ways we will continue to support them – their security needs, their humanitarian needs, their economic needs, their political needs. But I wouldn't want to characterize it beyond that.

QUESTION: Ned?

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: The president, President Zelenskyy, also made an appeal for a no-fly zone. Is any consideration being given to that?

MR PRICE: We are in regular dialogue as I just said with our Ukrainian partners. We are

... . We are in regular dialogue, as I just said, with our Ukrainian partners. We are looking at a range of ways we can continue to support them, but I wouldn't want to go beyond that.

Lalit.

QUESTION: On a halt in the bilateral talks with Russia, can you give us a couple of examples of issues that are of such significant national security interest that you – they will continue?

MR PRICE: Well, I'll offer one, at least. Of course it remains in our interest to see to it that Iran is never able to acquire a nuclear weapon. The fact that Russia has now invaded Ukraine should not give Iran the green light to develop a nuclear weapon, to weaponize, to move towards the point at which it can quickly acquire a nuclear weapon. It remains as in our interest today to deny Iran that ability than it was on Saturday.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PRICE: Lalit.

QUESTION: Thank you. I wanted to ask you about —

QUESTION: Wait, wait, hold on. Okay, that's one. But the list that I saw goes – includes the Arctic Council. It includes climate change talks. Is there anything significant that – like, does it include the Strategic Dialogue?

MR PRICE: We have no plans to take part in another Strategic Dialogue at the moment.

QUESTION: At the moment?

MR PRICE: At the moment.

QUESTION: And again, all of this stuff is suspension. It's not permanent. So should Russia change its —

MR PRICE: The point —

QUESTION: — its course, these would resume?

MR PRICE: The – much like sanctions, these are a means to an end. What we are trying to do is to change on an urgent basis Moscow’s behavior, to bring this violence to an end, to bring this conflict to an end, to bring the suffering that Russia is inflicting on the Ukrainian people to an end.

Lalit.

QUESTION: I want to ask you about India-U.S. relationship in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. You know India has a strong relationship with Russia and so has with the United States as well. Has the Ukrainian crisis strained India-U.S. relationship?

MR PRICE: We have a broad strategic partnership with India. As you know, we had an opportunity to see our Indian counterpart, Foreign Minister Jaishankar, in Australia just the other day when we were in the Indo-Pacific for a meeting of the Quad. What we have done, including in the context of the bilateral discussion we had with Foreign Minister Jaishankar in Sydney – sorry, in Melbourne – was to share our fervent belief that countries around the world, especially those countries that have a level of influence, of clout, of leverage with the Russian Federation needed to use that to good effect, needed to use that to protect the rules-based international order, again, that have worked to the benefit of the United States, that have worked to the benefit of our European allies, that have worked to the benefit of India and, quite frankly, have worked to the benefit of the Russian Federation over the course of some 70 years.

We share important interests with India. We share important values with India. And we know India has a relationship with Russia that is distinct from the relationship that we have with Russia. Of course, that is okay. What we have asked of every country around the world is that they use that leverage to good effect to uphold those norms, those rules that have been at the center, again, of unprecedented levels over the past 70 years of security, stability, and prosperity.

QUESTION: Do you believe that India has influence or leverage over Russia?

MR PRICE: India has a relationship with Russia that we certainly don’t have. India and Russia have a relationship, including in the defense and security sector, that we don’t have. And

again, we have asked every country that has a relationship, and certainly those countries that have leverage, to use that leverage in a constructive way.

QUESTION: I have one more question on – Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan was recently in Moscow when Russia attacked Ukraine. This is the first time in 20 years a Pakistani prime minister had visited Russia. Do you see realignment of forces there?

MR PRICE: Well, I will leave it to our Pakistani partners to speak to their position on this. What I can say is that we communicated to Pakistan our position on what was then the threat of a Russian invasion and what is now the ongoing Russian invasion against Ukraine. Just as India does, Pakistan knows precisely where we stand on this. These are, again, rules, norms, guidelines that benefit India, Pakistan, the United States, and Russia as well.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you. I have a follow-up on Minsk talks and a broader point about the conflict. Is the United States – has the United States been explicitly asking the Ukrainians not to take part in the proposed talks?

MR PRICE: We have been in regular contact with our Ukrainian partners. We want to see diplomacy. We want to see diplomacy succeed, and we want that precisely because only through diplomacy can we bring an end to this needless, unprovoked, brutal conflict, and only through diplomacy can we save lives on a sustainable basis. So first and most important, we want to see diplomacy. We want to see diplomacy succeed.

A corollary to that – we want to know that Russia is actually interested in genuine diplomacy. It now appears quite clear that Russia was not and has not been interested in genuine diplomacy. They were interested in the pretense of diplomacy. And as I said before, in the context of the ongoing invasion, diplomacy at the barrel of a gun – that is not genuine diplomacy. That is coercive diplomacy. That is coercion with the guise of diplomatic niceties. That is not something that can bring an end to this conflict in a way that we know it must end.

QUESTION: And my broader point, if I may – why do you think this military operation is taking place? Is this because the Russians are so inherently evil that they woke up one day and decided to attack a neighboring country? Or is it because of some broader and deeper roots

that needs to be addressed, like, for instance, the international security architecture doesn't work in its current form?

MR PRICE: You'll have to ask that question of President Putin. Only he can give you a good answer to – or he – only he can give you an answer; I'm not sure it'll be a good one – to explain his decisions.

But let me make one point. This is not and was not a decision of the Russian people. This was a decision that was made for them. This was not a decision that was made by them. And even in recent hours, in recent days, we have seen thousands of brave Russians take to the streets peacefully to demonstrate against what they see as precisely what we see: an unprovoked, an unjustified, a needless war that will inflict costs not only on Ukraine but also on Russia.

The fact is that Russians are unlikely to see their countrymen come back in body bags because Putin controls just about every instrument of communication, every mass media – every element of the mass media. But Russians will be coming home in body bags. This has already had a devastating, consequential effect on the Russian economy. This has already had consequential implications for Russia's strategic ambitions both at the present and going forward.

So this is not a decision, judging by what we're seeing, from the Russian people themselves that they wanted to see. This is not a decision that many of them support. The American people, the United States Government, we are standing on the side of those Russians who are peacefully taking to the streets to voice their concern, their criticism, their in some cases deep condemnation of what is going on, and to exert the rights that are as universal to them as they are to anyone anywhere else. They are doing this in the face of continued crackdowns against the exercise of these same – very same universal rights. This is, just as we have said of so many other tactics, straight from Putin's playbook. The fact that dissent of this nature – peaceful protests, peaceful demonstrations – are quashed and crushed in short order, that is symptomatic of a deep-seated insecurity on the part of President Putin, of those around him.

So I want to be very clear that even though this was a decision – a reckless, brutal, costly decision by President Putin and his lieutenants, we are under no illusions that this has the support of the Russian people, and in fact, we're seeing the Russian people indicate very clearly, many of them, that this is something they reject.

QUESTION: Can I have one more on that?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Would the United States like to see a resumption of talks on Euro-Atlantic security, and maybe even talks with China about the international security architecture overall, to maybe try and update it or overhaul it as necessary?

MR PRICE: So I'll make two points. Prior to the onset of this needless war, we had made a genuine, good-faith offer together with our allies and partners to discuss with the Russian Federation certain areas where we thought we could make progress on a reciprocal basis. These would have been discussions about, just as you said, broader European security architecture, the placement of offensive missiles in Europe, arms control protocols, arms control agreements, when it – steps when it comes to stability, transparency as well.

That was very much on the table. The Russian Federation again engaged in this pretense of diplomacy with us. There was an exchange, as everyone knows by now, of written proposals, written responses, there were high-level meetings, all of which culminated in what we've now seen: the Russian invasion of Ukraine, perhaps an invasion that was planned all along.

That is not our near-term priority. Our near-term priority for diplomacy going forward is to bring as quickly as possible an end to this needless violence, this brutality that the Russian Federation is directing against the Ukrainian state, against the Ukrainian Government, and against the Ukrainian people. That is our near-term focus.

QUESTION: Can I go back —

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

QUESTION: — to these bilateral talks just for a second? Because I think I asked the wrong question. I should have – instead of asking you what is exempted, because I've seen the list of exemptions and it's frankly huge, can you give us an example of the kinds of talks that now are no longer going to take place?

MR PRICE: You're asking me to —

QUESTION: Well, I mean, are we talking about cultural exchanges or what?

MR PRICE: Matt, I —

QUESTION: I mean, because if you look at the list of stuff that's exempted, you start with the JCPOA, you go to climate, you go to COVID, you go to anything having to do with consular affairs —

MR PRICE: What you will see —

QUESTION: — you go to anything that the seventh floor thinks is significant enough, which could be anything. So I'm just wondering what it is that is that —

MR PRICE: You will see – you will see —

QUESTION: You have the Arctic Council in there, you have every single, like —

MR PRICE: You will see – you will see a focus on our core national security interests.

QUESTION: Yeah, but every international organization – contact with the Russians at every international organization is carved out, it's exempted from this.

MR PRICE: Matt, I'm not sure this —

QUESTION: Everything from the ICAO to the Arctic Council to the OSCE to —

MR PRICE: We are going to pursue —

QUESTION: Oh, I know, so what is – what has been banned or halted because of this directive?

MR PRICE: We are going to pursue what is in our national security interest. Some of the things you just listed are fundamental to our national security interests. Just because Russia has taken this action doesn't mean that we should stop caring about our own security, the well-being, the welfare, the safety, the security of the American people. You've seen for yourself at least what purports to be a list of areas where we need to engage, we might need to engage to

pursue those core national security interests. I will leave it to your well-informed imagination what might not meet that criteria.

QUESTION: I'm not – no, I'm just wondering, can you point to something specific that is now no longer able to be talked about with the Russians bilaterally because of this? Because it just seems like almost everything that one can imagine except for, I don't know, licensing for artwork to come to be loaned to a museum —

MR PRICE: The Russian —

QUESTION: — is included, is exempted.

MR PRICE: The unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine has contoured, has changed our bilateral relationship. So —

QUESTION: I'm not – I understand that. I'm —

QUESTION: I have something specific that I want to ask about arms talks.

MR PRICE: Please. Please, Vivian. About what talks?

QUESTION: Are arms talks – arms talks.

MR PRICE: So —

QUESTION: Are they off the table completely now?

MR PRICE: At this point, we do not have any plans for the next iteration of the Strategic Stability Dialogue. Arms control is an area – whether it's in the context of the JCPOA, if you want to consider that an arms control agreement, or the fact that the United States and the Russian Federation have the two largest nuclear arsenals on the planet – it would remain in our national security interest to see to it that nuclear material, nuclear warheads, that nuclear stockpiles remain under control in the positive control of the Russian Federation, that stockpiles that remain – that nuclear arsenals remain small, as small as possible. Certainly, arms control is something that will continue to be in our national security interest, but we don't have another iteration of the Strategic Stability Dialogue planned.

QUESTION: I have a specific thing on that. So today the – in London they canceled the performance of the Bolshoi Ballet yesterday. The Kennedy Center canceled the performance of a Russian ballet. Are cultural exchange exchanges or commercially – commercial cultural visits now off the table in the U.S.?

MR PRICE: I don't want to be categorical about it. Again, this is not a decision that was taken by the Russian people. This was a decision —

QUESTION: But I mean, this is still – I understand that. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I understand that the Russian people didn't do this. But still, is the U.S. – will the U.S. be blocking this? I mean, you've had a member of Congress, a Democrat, who suggested that Russian students should be expelled from U.S. schools and expelled from the U.S. So are we going that far that we're not going to allow Russian cultural visits, or it indicates —

MR PRICE: We are exacting – we are exacting costly consequences for President Putin, for those around him, for the Kremlin, for the Russian Government. Our goal is not to punish the Russian people. Our goal is to stand with the Russian people, many of whom are taking to the streets in protest of this war that has the potential to devastate their country, their economy, their society as well.

So again, I'm not prepared to tell you today precisely what will be canceled, whether the Bolshoi will be coming to Washington within the next several days or several weeks. What I can tell you is that we are going to continue to exact costing – costly consequences for the Kremlin, but we will continue to stand up for the universal rights of the Russian people.

QUESTION: Should you go ahead and follow suit – not you personally, but Treasury or whoever is going to be announcing the – the EU sanctions that were introduced today against President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov, I just want to be clear. Would that complicate any communication between the President and the president, or the Secretary and the foreign minister, or any meetings that —

MR PRICE: So you've just posed a hypothetical wrapped in a hypothetical, so it's a little bit difficult for me to —

QUESTION: Well —

QUESTION: It's about to happen.

MR PRICE: — for me to answer that.

QUESTION: Well, should we —

MR PRICE: And I appreciate the breaking news updates from Reuters. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Should we ask again in 10 minutes? (Laughter.)

MR PRICE: Hopefully, I'll be out of here in 10 minutes. (Laughter.) What I would say is that we will always keep the door open to diplomacy.

QUESTION: Okay, so —

MR PRICE: We would not do anything that would shut the door to genuine diplomacy.

QUESTION: Okay, so these – and so such talks would be ones that are, like, exempted —

MR PRICE: You're not going to extract anything else from me on this front, at this time at least.

Dmitry.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: You announced – I mean, the State Department has announced recently the expulsion of the Russian DCM. From your point of view, it's a response to what the Russians have been doing. The Russians are saying pretty much the same thing. This vicious cycle has been going on for some time now. And this is not the policy stuff; this is purely technical issues. Why can't you resolve those problems of at least letting your diplomatic missions to work properly? The Russians are saying, guys, let's reset all those mutual claims that we have. You're saying no, or that's my understanding. And I'd like to hear your take on that.

MR PRICE: I think you might be misinformed. We have been very clear that, especially during times of tensions, especially during times of crisis, especially during times of conflict, it is important for governments to be able to communicate, to correspond with one another. What we've seen from the Russian Federation over the course of months now has been a constriction on the part of our embassy operations in Moscow. Most recently, we saw them on an unprovoked basis expel our DCM.

The watchwords, the buzzword for us, is parity. That's precisely what we are seeking. The Russian embassy here in Washington is more resourced, better resourced than is our diplomatic mission in Moscow. We're looking for parity; we're looking for fairness. So this step we announced yesterday, the fact that we had expelled or indicated to the Russian Federation that we would be expelling their second-ranking official here in Washington, it was not a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was a response to what Russia has done to our bilateral mission in Moscow.

All right, thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:34 p.m.)

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