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# Department Press Briefing – February 7, 2022

NED PRICE, DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON

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2:36 p.m. EST

**MR PRICE:** Good afternoon. One element at the top, and then we'll go ahead and get started with your questions.

The United States is deeply concerned by Tunisian President Saied's calls to dissolve the Supreme Judicial Council, and the reported barring of employees from entering the Supreme Judicial Council.

An independent judiciary is a core element of an effective and transparent democracy.

It is essential that the Government of Tunisia uphold its commitments to respect the independence of the judiciary as stipulated in the constitution.

The United States reiterates our calls for an accelerated political reform process in Tunisia that responds to the aspirations of the Tunisian people through the inclusion of diverse voices representing political parties, civil society and unions, particularly in the ongoing national consultations, and that ensures the continued respect for Tunisia's human rights.

At this critical time, we also urge the Government of Tunisia to prioritize implementing the economic reforms required to stabilize the financial situation and address Tunisia's growing economic challenges.

With that, happy to take your questions. Matt.

**QUESTION:** Thanks, Ned. So I realize that Ukraine is still the flavor of the day, but I don't really have anything big on Ukraine, so I will – after I ask my first very brief initial question I'll defer to others on Ukraine because I want to go to Iran.

Just on Ukraine, the joint statement – I realize that in the press conference the Secretary and Mr. Borrell spoke about Russia, but I'm just wondering why there was no mention of Russia at all in the joint statement from the EU-U.S. Energy Council meeting. I mean, it wasn't – the word wasn't even in there.

**MR PRICE:** Well, the word Ukraine certainly was. There was a —

**QUESTION:** Yes, it was.

**MR PRICE:** There was a robust discussion of Ukraine. There was a robust discussion of the contingency planning that we're doing in the event that Russia does not choose the path of diplomacy, does not choose the path of dialogue. And as the joint statement noted, the council reiterated that it is unacceptable to use energy supplies as a weapon or geopolitical lever. This is what we have been saying all along, and much of the discussion today between the Secretary and between the high representative was part and parcel of the contingency planning that we've been doing for some time now.

**QUESTION:** Okay. But what – I mean, was there a reason that Russia is not mentioned in there? I mean presumably, yes, it's obvious that the threat to European energy security is coming from Russia. They are the main supplier and this is – but I'm just wondering why it wasn't mentioned. Was there some objection to it being mentioned, or was it – did it ever come up in the discussions?

**MR PRICE:** I am not aware there was any substantive reason for it. It's a question of syntax.

**QUESTION:** All right. Then I will pass and —

**MR PRICE:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** But I do want to – I have a couple important ones on Iran.

**MR PRICE:** I'm sure we'll get there. Daphne.

**QUESTION:** Senior U.S. officials are in Europe this week coordinating sanctions and export control measures that can be used in the event that Russia invades Ukraine. Is the U.S. looking for commitments from counterparts during this trip on what action will be taken if Russia invades, and will Nord Stream 2 be part of discussions?

**MR PRICE:** So, Daphne, what we spoke about earlier was the fact that we continue to take part in robust and to lead robust coordination and consultation with our European partners and allies on the consequences that would befall Moscow if it chooses the path of aggression. We have been consulting very closely with our allies and our partners over the course not of weeks but really of months now, and that includes the package that would respond to Russian aggression.

And so as you alluded to, today a U.S. delegation that included officials from Treasury and from the Department of State, including the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes Elizabeth Rosenberg, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Administration Assistant Secretary Rozman Kendler, Deputy Assistant Secretary here at the State Department Molly Montgomery, traveling to Europe to discuss technical coordination. And so over the past several weeks and even longer, we have discussed at a strategic level what we would – what the consequences that would befall Moscow were it choose – were it to choose this path.

There have been very detailed discussions in the context of that. Beyond the broad top lines there are a myriad of details and technical matters that will need to be worked out if we are in the unfortunate position of having to move forward with this strong and unified response. And so what you – what our team from the State Department, from the Department of Commerce, from the Department of Treasury are doing is meeting with their counterparts and European interlocutors to have those – to continue, I should say, those technical discussions to ensure that across the board we're ready to go should, again, we be in the unfortunate position of needing to mobilize this response.

**QUESTION:** And will Nord Stream 2 be a part of that?

**MR PRICE:** Well, I don't know if it'll be part of these specific discussions. What I can say is that, of course, the President is meeting with Chancellor Scholz today at the White House. Leading up to this meeting we have had a number of discussions with our German allies on energy security

broadly, on Nord Stream 2 specifically, both in the context of what we're seeing from Russia and beyond.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Ned?

**MR PRICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Ned. Good to see you again.

**MR PRICE:** Good to see you.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. I have a few questions on South Korea, China, and North Korea. First of all, on South Korea: South Korea Government frequently fails to participate in the UN Security Council statement condemning North Korea's missile provocations or ignored North Korea's human rights issues. How does the U.S. evaluate South Korea's attitude?

The second one, on China. After the UN Security Council meeting last week, the Chinese ambassador to the UN has blamed United States for the recent missile launch by North Korea. As you know, the South Korea – and I'm sorry, he has insisted that the U.S. should take more flexible approach, as in you know South – North Korea and China and Russia are strategically the same body. What is the United States position on China justifying North Korea's missile provocations?

**MR PRICE:** So let me take your first question first. As you know, since the start of this administration we have been investing heavily in our alliances and partnerships around the globe, and of course, that includes in the Indo-Pacific. There are a number of shared challenges and shared opportunities we have with our allies in the Indo-Pacific, of course, our treaty allies Japan and the ROK among them. And among those challenges are the DPRK, maybe one of the more – certainly is one of the more pressing challenges we have with those allies.

In recent days, the deputy secretary, the – our Special Representative for the DPRK Sung Kim, they have engaged their South Korean, their ROK, and Japanese counterparts. And as I think you know, this evening we'll be departing for Australia, where we will see our Japanese counterparts in the context of the Quad – there will be a bilateral engagement there – before we then go by

way of Fiji to Hawaii, where we'll engage in a trilateral discussion with our South Korean and Japanese counterparts. And I think you – I can be confident that one of the priority issues of discussion in that setting will be the recent provocations we've seen from the DPRK, including its missile launches.

We know that when it comes to the fulfillment and the achievement of any progress towards our overriding goal, one of the indispensable ingredients is close coordination with our allies and partners. And the Japan – Japan and ROK are, of course, two of our allies with whom we work with most closely on this challenge. We know that that bilateral coordination is important, but we also know that trilateral coordination between the United States, Japan, and the ROK really is and will be indispensable if we are to achieve progress. It's also a priority for our allies, Japan and the ROK, because of the threat that the DPRK poses not only to Americans in the region, potentially to deployed forces, but also to our treaty allies Japan and the ROK. So it's something we take extraordinarily seriously and we know they do as well.

When it comes to – and this gets to your second question – our approach to the DPRK, look, if you want to assign responsibility for the DPRK's provocations, for the potential threats to international peace and security we've seen emanate from the DPRK, the only party that deserves blame, the only party that can be assigned culpability, is the DPRK. We have made very clear that we have no hostile intent towards the DPRK. We have made very clear that we wish to engage in dialogue and diplomacy. We have made very clear that we believe that only through dialogue and diplomacy can we most effectively achieve what, again, is our overriding policy objective, and that's the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

**QUESTION:** Follow-up, quick questions. North Korea has been engaged in peace process dialogue with the United States and South Korea in the past, while on the other hand it has been accelerating its – has been North Korea military buildup work. What is the ultimate tool for the United States besides diplomatic compromise to block North Korea global threat?

**MR PRICE:** Well, the ultimate tool is diplomacy, and we know that previous administrations have tried this. No administration has been successful, despite undertaking strategies that, in many cases, look very different from one another. And so the strategy we have is not akin to the strategy that the last administration had. It is not also exactly akin to the strategy that the Obama administration had. It is a strategy that the Biden-Harris administration has put forward after an intense policy review, and a policy review that determined that, through diplomacy and dialogue,

it is our hope that there can be incremental progress – incremental progress towards the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Now, of course, we have not yet found a willing partner in Pyongyang to engage in that dialogue, but we have continued even in the absence of substantive engagement from the DPRK to coordinate closely with Japan, with the ROK, other allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, but also allies and partners around the world, which you have seen us do in the UN, which you've seen us do in Europe, and elsewhere as we take on this challenge.

Said.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Can I go to the Palestinian issue?

**MR PRICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** I have a couple questions on settler violence on Omar Assad. But before that, the White House issued a statement saying that President Biden is going to go and visit Israel later this year. Is he likely to also go – I mean, I know this is a White House probably question, but do you think that he will also make a detour to, like, Bethlehem or Ramallah 20 minutes away?

**MR PRICE:** Well, Said, as you alluded to, the readout of the conversation between President Biden and Prime Minister Bennett did make a reference to President Biden's intent to travel to the region later this year. Obviously, this was just announced yesterday, so I wouldn't want to get into the itinerary at this point. In any case, I'd need to refer you to the White House.

**QUESTION:** I understand. Ned, I mean, you – almost every week, you come – you state opposition or displeasure with settler violence activities and so on. And I mean, in the last four days, I could cite a number of issues. I don't want to go through them all – I mean, the Israelis – from home demolishing to attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque to poisoning of wells. I mean, all kinds of things, a whole – across the gamut. When will you guys issue a very strong statement and say this should not stand? I mean, if you want to give the two-state solution, as you keep saying, a chance, they should stop right now this stuff.

**MR PRICE:** Said, I would take issue with the premise of your question. We have spoken to this clearly and unequivocally —

**QUESTION:** I understand that you've spoken – sorry to interrupt, but you speak all the time. I said that to begin with. But you – what action are you taking to make sure that what you say is actually listened to and adhered to?

**MR PRICE:** Well, first of all, it is important what we say. And you have – as you alluded to, you've heard me say this, including in recent days. But we have been very clear, we have been very consistent on this: We believe it is absolutely critical for all parties to refrain from steps that exacerbate tensions. This includes violence, incitement to violence; home demolitions; the eviction of families from homes in East Jerusalem, including families that have lived there for generations; that includes the destruction of property and for providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism. All of these things move us further away from what continues to be our desired end state, and that is a two-state solution – a two-state solution that continues to be in the best interests of Israel, of the Palestinian people, and something that successive American administrations have supported.

**QUESTION:** Now, one last question on Omar Assad, the Palestinian-American who died in Israeli custody. I know that last Tuesday you guys issued a statement. Has anything transpired since then? Have the Israelis come forward to you? Are you completely satisfied, or are you still asking for more accountability? Because apparently, those who did it, they were sort of slapped on the wrist.

**MR PRICE:** Well, we did issue a statement on this yesterday. That statement spoke of our concern, but it also spoke of our ongoing dialogue with our Israeli partners on this.

**QUESTION:** You did?

**MR PRICE:** We did. We issued one on February 1st, I believe.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, not yesterday. Yesterday —

**MR PRICE:** Sorry, did I say yesterday?



**QUESTION:** Yes, you did.

**MR PRICE:** We issued it last week. I'm sorry.

**QUESTION:** Last Tuesday. Last week we got it.

**MR PRICE:** Yes, yes. Yes.

**QUESTION:** Just a quick update on Ukraine.

**MR PRICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any idea when you're going to have the formal response from Moscow and when there is new engagement with Foreign Minister Lavrov —

**MR PRICE:** We don't have any updates on that. As I conveyed last week, the Secretary had an opportunity to speak to Foreign Minister Lavrov. It was our understanding following that engagement that the Russians were working on a response to our so-called non-paper, a response that would be sent to and approved, presumably, by Vladimir Putin before it would be transmitted back to us. That has not yet happened. It was also our understanding that once that did happen, that the Russians would be prepared to engage in follow-on diplomacy, but again, we'll need to — the first step in that was receiving the Russian response, which has not yet happened.

**QUESTION:** And do you expect that follow-on engagement can happen while the Secretary is traveling, or more probably when he comes back from his travel?

**MR PRICE:** We don't have any additional details to share in terms of timing, in terms of format or the mode for that engagement, so I'd hesitate to get ahead of it.

Ben.

**QUESTION:** Can I just make sure — I think I know the answer to this, but I just want to make about the — and without getting into the whole back and forth that happened last week, your —

**MR PRICE:** I don't know what you're talking about, Matt.

**QUESTION:** No, and nor do I. Your belief that there is some Russian false flag operation that's being planned has not changed, right, since last Thursday? Is that correct?

**MR PRICE:** That is correct. That is correct.

**QUESTION:** And are you prepared today to offer any additional —

**MR PRICE:** What I am prepared to do today is to explain what I perhaps inartfully tried to do last week in explaining what it is we're trying to do and why we're not able to provide a full set of information or at least all of the information that you and your colleagues may ask for. The Secretary spoke to this briefly earlier today, but this gets to our bottom line proposition. We believe that the best antidote to disinformation is information, and that is why you have seen us employ concerted efforts across the board. We want to go the extra mile to ensure that, again, to the extent possible, the American people and people around the world have an understanding of what we know and what undergirds our concern for the threat that Moscow poses.

Now, an element of that has been our declassification of information, including intelligence information, that is in our possession. And as you heard me say last week, we've done that with two overriding objectives in mind. The first and, of course, our preference is to be in a position to deter the Russians from going forward. We want by exposing this information and making sure that Moscow knows what we know to have them think twice or many more times before moving forward with such a reckless action.

If we're not able to do that, if we're not able to deter further invasion or aggression against Ukraine, we at least want to be in the position of having let the world know that despite the disinformation, despite the propaganda and lies that presumably Moscow will say after the fact, that the world will know what we knew all along, and that is the fact that Moscow sought to fabricate a pretext for this aggression very similar to what they did in 2014. Matt, you know that in 2014 the Russians went into Ukraine, sent their proxy forces into Ukraine, claiming that Russians were under threat, claiming that a three-year-old boy had been crucified, claiming that they had no choice but to do so. Again, this is why we are so concerned about what we are seeing now and what we know now.

Now, in taking this approach, we recognize that the information that we're able to put forward will necessarily be limited, and it will be limited for a reason that you also know well. Again, we

will necessarily be limited, and it will be limited for a reason that you also know well. Again, we –

even as we seek to expose Moscow's efforts, we don't want to jeopardize or potentially jeopardize our ability to collect this kind of information going forward. But when we do the cost-benefit analysis and we consider if the choice is between putting forward necessarily incomplete, sometimes broad, sometimes general information in an attempt to deter aggression or, on the other hand, if the choice is to keep that to ourselves and potentially not play every card available to us, that's not a difficult choice.

Again, we are doing this in an effort to, in the first instance, deter; if we're not able to do that, to expose what Moscow has had in mind all along. We want to see this crisis resolved peacefully, we want to see this crisis resolved diplomatically, and we will do everything we responsibly think we can – responsible in terms of tactics, but also responsible in terms of our national security and our ability to continue to benefit from this information going forward to bring about what we hope is a diplomatic outcome.

**QUESTION:** Okay. So – and I'm not going to get into sort of what like we – I did last week, but the bottom line is that no, you are not prepared to share any of the information that you have that would suggest that this is actually correct?

**MR PRICE:** Well —

**QUESTION:** Is that right?

**MR PRICE:** Again, we have shared significant information —

**QUESTION:** No, no —

**MR PRICE:** And —

**QUESTION:** Ned, I said I didn't want to get back into this. Do you have anything more that you can say —

**MR PRICE:** Beyond —

**QUESTION:** — to back up the claim than you did – than you had to say last week? That's all.

**MR PRICE:** Beyond what we told you last week —

**QUESTION:** No.

**MR PRICE:** — in pretty detailed terms about the Russian plans —

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**MR PRICE:** We don't have anything further to offer on that.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And then and the proof —

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**QUESTION:** Then you're saying – hold on, Said, just – last one. The proof that you're correct is that nothing is actually going to happen? Is that what you're saying?

**MR PRICE:** No, I – that is not – that's not —

**QUESTION:** Because you will have – because you putting this out there will have stopped the Russians from doing it, correct?

**MR PRICE:** No, I – what I said is that our overriding objective in the first instance is to deter Russian aggression. That is why we are doing a number of things.

**QUESTION:** I'm speaking entirely only about this alleged false flag operation that you're talking about. You're saying that the proof that there is a false flag operation is going to come when nothing actually happens, right?

**MR PRICE:** I did not say that, Matt.

**QUESTION:** Well —

**MR PRICE:** I said that our overriding objective is to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine, further Russian aggression against Ukraine. I acknowledge I will probably never be able – well, I will certainly never be able to give you the proof that you I'm sure want. But we are doing this – we are doing this not in an effort, I'm sorry to say, to satisfy you but in an effort to prevent and deter an invasion

**QUESTION:** It's not really about satisfying me. But anyway, I don't want to – I don't want to take up —

**QUESTION:** Ned, can you clarify something at this time?

**MR PRICE:** Please.

**QUESTION:** So you think that the Russians are still scheming to do this today with the same intensity as they were last week? Or have they —

**MR PRICE:** I'm not in a position to give you an update on this specific scheme, but I think our concerns about the Russians potentially resorting to these tactics, the same sort of false flag tactics that they have – that they did resort to in the past, those concerns are still very present.

**QUESTION:** Okay, you know one gets the impression that an attack or an invasion is imminent, it's just a question of time, maybe a few days, mid-month, whatever. So on the scale of one to ten – I know you guys like this – what is the likelihood of invasion? Is it about seven? Is it about eight? Are we today closer to nine, let's say, than we were last week?

**MR PRICE:** I am going to refer you to Vladimir Putin. Again, we have put forward these two paths. It is our strong, strong preference that we pursue the path of diplomacy and dialogue. What I will say and what you heard the National Security Advisor speak to yesterday is that we are now in the window, given what we have seen from the Russians over weeks and even longer now – amassing troops along Ukraine's borders, dispatching forces into Belarus, taking other steps that have positioned them to move forward at any moment if they so choose.

We do not yet believe that Vladimir Putin has made a decision. It is our goal in all of this, including what I was discussing with Matt just a moment ago, to deter an invasion. If we're not able to deter an invasion, we will then resort to the other path. It's a path of hefty, stark consequences for Russia. It's also a path of defense for our allies on the eastern flank of NATO.

**QUESTION:** Are you aware of reports where a high-level Russian officer – or the head of the officers school, whatever it is – warned Putin against the invasion of Ukraine?

**MR PRICE:** I've seen these reports. I understand that there was an open letter, so I've certainly

seek that – seen that. Again, I don't have a specific comment on it. Our goal is to solve conflicts through diplomacy. We're seeking to do that for the good of the American people, the good of Ukrainian people, the good of the Russian people, and people all throughout Europe, knowing that any renewed invasion of Ukraine would carry tremendous costs, tremendous costs across many realms. It's our goal to do everything we can to avoid that.

Yes, Ben.

**QUESTION:** You just said in your answer to Matt that if you have to put forward incomplete information to deter an attack, then so be it. What were you referring to there? I mean, is the intelligence behind this video perhaps incomplete?

**MR PRICE:** No, I was referring to the fact that there have been demands for everything we have in our possession behind this intelligence, and that's not something we're able to provide, again, because of our desire not to jeopardize sources and methods, our desire not to jeopardize —

**QUESTION:** Well, if you're referring to me, that's not true. I asked for literally, quote/unquote, any shred of evidence – not even proof, because not all evidence is proof. I asked for anything. I didn't ask for everything. I didn't ask for sources or methods. I just asked —

**MR PRICE:** I think —

**QUESTION:** — for anything that would back it up. That's all.

**MR PRICE:** The challenge, Matt, is that by divulging details, further details, you would necessarily get into sources and methods. And so that is why we're in the position of putting forward what we know in a way that we consider to be responsible vis-à-vis our objectives going forward, and one of those objectives going forward is to protect our ability to collect this kind of information going forward. We are trying to strike a very difficult balance. There are – when it comes to national security and the tension, the inherent tension between national security and transparency, there is never an easy formula. Not always do we get it right. No administration has always gotten it right, but we are leaning forward here.

The only reason we're having this discussion is because we publicized some of what was in our possession. We could have kept that to ourselves. It would have made for a much less memorable briefing last Thursday, but that wasn't the responsible thing in our estimation to do.

Again, we want to make sure at the end of the day, whether we are able to deter an invasion or whether in the aftermath of an invasion, that we have done everything we responsibly can to do that. And one of the tactics we've used, one of the tactics I would say we've used probably more so than previous administrations, is declassifying information or making public information that previously was not public. That is not something that – it is not something that administrations have done certainly to this degree.

**QUESTION:** You also say that we're in the window now where an attack might happen. You've said it repeatedly that an attack is imminent.

**MR PRICE:** We've never said repeatedly that an attack is imminent. We have said that we are now in the window where if —

**QUESTION:** I think numerous times you've used the word "imminent."

**MR PRICE:** We – we have said that if Vladimir Putin decides to move —

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) and 50,000 people are going to be dead. What are you talking about?

**MR PRICE:** I can't be accountable for what others write. What we have said —

**QUESTION:** What others write?

**MR PRICE:** What —

**QUESTION:** And "imminent" is a word that has been used.

**MR PRICE:** What we have said is that if Vladimir Putin decides to go forward with an invasion, they have now positioned themselves to the degree that they're able to do that whether it is within a day, within a couple weeks. They have now reached that point.

But imminent suggests that this is a foregone conclusion, that this is a certainty. So —

**QUESTION:** No one in the administration has used the word "imminent" to describe —

**MR PRICE:** I think what you might have heard is potentially imminent. That —

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MR PRICE:** What – if an invasion were imminent, we would not be prioritizing diplomacy and dialogue the way we have. Imminence suggests that this is a foregone conclusion, that there is no way to avoid it.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**MR PRICE:** I think if you've been listening to what we've been saying for the past two months now, the emphasis we've placed on dialogue and diplomacy, the emphasis that we've placed on deterring an invasion, the emphasis that we have placed on finding a diplomatic way out of this, you would understand that we're not talking about something that is a foregone conclusion. We are talking about something that is one of two paths. We've consistently talked about one of two paths. It's certainly possible that Vladimir Putin will choose that path. It is our hope that he will choose the path of diplomacy and dialogue, that we can avoid the bloodshed, that we can avoid the violence, that we can avoid the destabilizing forces that would descend not only on Ukraine but well beyond in terms of the implications.

**QUESTION:** My question was actually going to be: Considering that we are in that window now and there's talk of a potentially imminent invasion, was there ever a discussion about postponing the Australia trip? Is now the right time to be crossing the world, going to Fiji, when this invasion could happen at any time?

**MR PRICE:** Ben, we are a big country. We are a big department. We have a lot of challenges on our plate. The Secretary of State is the Secretary of State wherever in the world he is. He has access to secure communications wherever in the world he is. He, I'm sure, will be focused to a large degree on this challenge even while he is in the Indo-Pacific. It will certainly come up in conversations with counterparts in the Quad and elsewhere, but I can assure you, you will also see that he will remain active on the phones with our interagency counterparts. He and we are capable of – again, not to use an overused metaphor, but of walking and chewing gum at the same time.

**QUESTION:** Sorry, Ned, but the Secretary said —

**QUESTION:** And juggling.

**MR PRICE:** And juggling.



**QUESTION:** The Secretary said that Ukraine is prepared to give special status in the Donbas region.

**MR PRICE:** He was referring to the – he was referring to —

**QUESTION:** Is that, like, sort of walking back from the – that sort of thing?

**MR PRICE:** No, it was – it is reiterating what’s in the Minsk Agreements. The Minsk Agreements spell out a means by which to de-escalate the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Special status is a term that’s used in the Minsk Agreements.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** Ben.

**QUESTION:** After you made the accusation last week – the administration – about this false flag operation and then the reassessments leaked over the weekend, the Ukrainian foreign minister tweeted today, “Do not believe the apocalyptic predictions. Different capitals are calculating different scenarios.” Is he wrong that there isn’t this sort of apocalyptic situation that you all are discussing?

**MR PRICE:** We see eye to eye with our Ukrainian partners in the sense that now is not the time for panic. What we are calling for, what we are doing is moving forward with preparation. We want to be prepared and we need to position ourselves to be prepared regardless of which path it is that Vladimir Putin takes. It’s our hope that we pursue that of dialogue and diplomacy. It is certainly possible that we are not able to deter an invasion and not able to deter renewed aggression and that we’ll have to be prepared for that path of defense and deterrence.

**QUESTION:** But, I mean, you say that you’re seeing eye to eye. He’s saying that what you’re saying is wrong.

**MR PRICE:** I don’t think you’ve heard us use the term “cataclysmic,” if that’s – if that was the quote.

**QUESTION:** “Apocalyptic.”

**MR PRICE:** “Apocalyptic.”

**QUESTION:** But he was specifically referring to what U.S. officials have said in recent days, in the last week.

**MR PRICE:** I – the Ukrainian ambassador to Washington has spoken to this; President Zelenskyy has spoken to our coordination with the Ukrainian Government. What we are doing is engaged in prudent preparation. We are doing that with our European allies but also with our Ukrainian partners.

**QUESTION:** When the Secretary and Foreign Minister Kuleba spoke on Friday, did the foreign minister express any of these concerns to the Secretary?

**MR PRICE:** Again, we issued a readout of that call, so I don’t have anything to add beyond that readout. We have a close relationship with Ukraine. Ukraine, of course, is a close partner of ours. We can speak candidly with close partners when it comes to our concerns. Our Ukrainian partners, our European allies, and others, they know of the basis for our concerns. Number one, they hear what we say publicly in the same way you do, but we are also in a position to share some of that underlying information with our European allies, with other allies, as well as with our Ukrainian partners.

**QUESTION:** Just one last question on this. During – in the Ukrainian readout as well, it said that the Secretary reaffirmed the U.S. was working to provide additional economic assistance to the Ukrainian Government. Can you say anything more about that? What’s on the table, dollar amount, or if anything is forthcoming?

**MR PRICE:** Well, so we have said for some time now that even as we work to provide Ukraine with security assistance, we know that this – certainly Russian aggression, even the threat of Russian aggression, could have a toll on Ukraine’s economy. So we have provided half a billion dollars in development and humanitarian assistance in the past year. We are exploring additional macroeconomic support to help Ukraine’s economy amidst pressure resulting from Russia’s military buildup.

Last week, on February 3rd, we and several of our allies and partners announced a new partnership fund for a resilient Ukraine. It’s a fund that bolsters the resilience and perseverance

of communities in eastern Ukraine, those communities that are in some ways bearing the brunt, have borne the brunt of Russia's aggression. USAID has an expert in the country who's monitoring the situation closely, coordinating with other donors, assessing the evolving humanitarian needs of the Ukrainian people, and liaising with partners to ensure that they are able to rapidly scale up assistance should the need arise.

Over the past year, we and Ukraine have finalized a memorandum of understanding on commercial cooperation. It's a memorandum, MOU, designed to facilitate commercial participation by U.S. companies across the Ukrainian economy and by Ukrainian companies here in the United States.

And then finally, the EXIM, the Export-Import Bank, has made available \$3 billion in support for projects in Ukraine, and the DFC, the Development Finance Corporation, has a current investment portfolio in Ukraine of approximately \$800 million across more than a dozen projects. Those range from renewable energy to higher education and access to financing for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Rosiland.

**QUESTION:** Stay on Ukraine?

**MR PRICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** I'm going to take off my mask because I can't hear when I wear this. You keep talking about we want to resolve this diplomatically. There are reports that the Ukrainians have asked the U.S. to station some THAAD anti-missile systems in the eastern part of the country, ostensibly to guard against any Russian missile attacks. The UK has decided to deploy 350 Royal Marines to Poland. Are these kinds of actions the thing that the West wants to be telegraphing if it wants Moscow to actually resolve all of these issues about Ukraine and about NATO's posture? I mean, how does that – how does moving troops and possibly stationing anti-missile systems actually get you what you want?

**MR PRICE:** Sure. So I can't speak to moves that haven't been announced, that are hypothetical, that may not come to pass. But what I can speak to is what we've announced, and everything we have announced has been in the vein of defense and deterrence, across the board. Whether it is our security assistance for Ukraine – the \$650 million that was provided last year – that is

defensive security assistance; whether it is the authorization for our NATO Allies to pass U.S.-origin material to Ukraine, that is defensive material.

When it comes to the service members who have been put on heightened state of readiness should they be called upon by the North Atlantic Council, that would be in the vein of defense and deterrence. When it comes to the service members who are being sent to offer reassurance and sent to deter further Russian aggression against – or Russian aggression, I should say – against NATO's eastern flank, that is done in the vein of defense and deterrence.

Everything we are doing is in an effort to see to it that we are not faced with a renewed Russian invasion, that Russian aggression does not move forward. Now, we are doing all of this also knowing that in the end, Vladimir Putin may choose the path of conflict, of an invasion, of renewed aggression. But we are doing, as I was saying to Matt and to others earlier, everything we can in an effort to in the first instance deter, but also to send a very clear signal that we stand by our commitments under Article 5 when it comes to protecting our NATO Allies, that the United States will live up to its obligations, the United States will continue to provide the sort of defensive security assistance that Ukraine needs to defend itself.

**QUESTION:** But deploying a THAAD system is a pretty serious deal. I mean, think about the controversy in Korea, where they have asked for the systems and it's engendered a lot of uproar as well as criticism from Pyongyang.

**MR PRICE:** Again, I can't speak to measures that haven't been announced or that remain hypothetical.

**QUESTION:** Let me also ask you about Macron's meeting with Putin today. What sense does the U.S. have about what Macron was going to try to bring up once the cameras left the meeting room? Has Ambassador Sullivan and his team been able to get a readout from the French on how willing Putin is to back away in this crisis?

**MR PRICE:** Well, when it comes to the engagement of our partners, let me make the broader point that over the past month-plus, we have heard from our European allies, we have heard from our Ukrainian partners, we've heard from others an appreciation for what the United States has been doing with Russia diplomatically, and that includes in our bilateral engagement. And in expressing that appreciation and understanding, we've heard from our allies and partners that

expressing that appreciation and understanding, we've heard from our allies and partners that

they have taken that approach because we have done all of this in a manner that is thoroughly coordinated, that has been consultative in its approach with our allies and partners, and that is conducted in full transparency with them. “Nothing about without” is not just a mantra for us, it is the guiding principle in terms of how we have conducted ourselves, including in this – in our bilateral engagements with Russia.

So, similarly, we would welcome any diplomatic efforts that are conducted in a similar manner that have the potential – excuse me – to de-escalate the crisis that Moscow has needlessly precipitated. When it comes to the French, as you know, President Biden yesterday had an opportunity to speak to President Macron. This would be his second conversation with the French president in several days. Secretary Blinken yesterday spoke to the foreign minister, Foreign Minister Le Drian. We are well coordinated across the board, and that includes with the French, with Paris.

The result of all of this is that the message President Putin is hearing from the United States, from NATO, from our allies and partner – partners, it is loud and it is singular, and that is the fact that a diplomatic solution is the only responsible path. But again, if Russia chooses otherwise, we will be prepared. We will be prepared with a response that is swift, severe, and united. I saw President Macron made comments just before he left. You will hear those same messages from the French president.

**QUESTION:** And is the U.S. confident that once Chancellor Scholz goes to Moscow next week that that same unified message is going to be delivered? Because Germany is in a slightly different position than other countries in Europe.

**MR PRICE:** Well, as luck would have it, Chancellor Scholz is in Washington today. He's at the White House today. But I should say this is not luck, the fact that Chancellor Scholz is here to have these consultations with President Biden, a follow-on to the consultations and the discussions that the two leaders have had over the phone and over video conference in recent weeks. This is a testament to the close and continued coordination and cooperation with our European allies across the board – board, excuse me – including, of course, with Germany. So I expect you'll be hearing a lot more about that today from the President and chancellor.

Yes, in the back.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, I'd like to ask about proximity of Vladimir Putin and Latin America. So last week the Argentinian President Alberto Fernández was in Moscow, and in the coming days the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro will be there. And there are reports in Brazil about the fact that the U.S. is putting pressure on Bolsonaro to cancel his trip to Russia. I would like you to elaborate a bit about the concerns and the reasons why the U.S. wants Brazil to skip this trip to Russia, and if the U.S. has the same confidence that – you talked about France – that you are well coordinated when we are talking about the Brazilian visit to Moscow.

**MR PRICE:** Well, we engage with our Brazilian partners on – at multiple levels regularly. We are, of course, aware of the reports of President Bolsonaro's travel plans. We and many other nations around the world, including in this hemisphere, are deeply concerned about the potentially destabilizing role that Russia is playing and its ongoing threat to sovereignty and to territorial integrity, including, of course, in Ukraine.

As democratic countries – the United States, Brazil, Argentina, others in the region and beyond – we have a responsibility to stand up for democratic principles and for the rules-based order. This is the same order that has undergirded unprecedented levels of stability, of security, of prosperity over the past 70 years, and that is true – it is equally true in Europe as it is in the Western Hemisphere, as it is in the Indo-Pacific. So we know that Brazil and other countries in the region – you mentioned Argentina as well – we share values. That is one of the hallmarks of our relationship, and we have – we know that those values will be conveyed and will undergird concerns that President Putin hears not only from the United States but our partners around the world.

**QUESTION:** But what does the U.S. expect from this Brazilian visit to Moscow?

**MR PRICE:** It's not for us to speak to what – the goals that President Bolsonaro may have in mind. I am confident that there will be discussions both before and after the trip with our Brazilian partners.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Ned. and if China pledges it support Russia's invasion of Ukraine. as well as North

Korea, what actions will the United States take against China for this?

**MR PRICE:** Sorry. Could you clarify the question?

**QUESTION:** Yeah. China pledged to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as North Korea. What actions will the United States take against China?

**MR PRICE:** Well, so if you're asking about the relationship between Russia and China, I know that this is something that our Assistant Secretary for Asia and Pacific Affairs Dan Kritenbrink spoke to last week. But what we have seen over the course not of days, not of weeks, but of years and probably longer, is an approach that both of these countries have taken for some time, and that is an increasing closeness between Russia and China.

It would be our hope, given the implications of a renewed Russian aggression and certainly Russian invasion of Ukraine, that the PRC would have taken advantage of dialogue, of this relationship, to encourage Russia to pursue the course of diplomacy and de-escalation. This is what the world expects of responsible powers.

The Secretary had a conversation with Foreign Minister Wang of the PRC the other week – the other day, I should say – and there was a discussion of the potential for renewed Russian aggression, renewed Russian invasion, of Ukraine, and the fact that it would not only have implications in Ukraine, not only in Europe, but in many ways it would be a threat to peace and security around the world because it would be a flagrant violation of the same rules-based international order that applies equally in the Indo-Pacific as it does in Europe.

If in the end China is seen as having supported Russia's move to choose conflict or war over diplomacy, it will cost China in terms of how it's seen in the eyes of the world. It will have an effect on the PRC's global reputation. We – as Russia and China talk about a singular partnership, we are focused with our 29 NATO Allies, we are working with the EU, we are working with our allies in the Indo-Pacific and partners around the world to not only incentivize and to work towards a diplomatic resolution, but also to be in a position to respond decisively if Russia does choose the path of aggression.

We told you last month of – we listed out many of the engagements that we've had with partners and allies. That tally has now grown to some 200 phone calls, in-person meetings, video conferences. Of course, one of them you saw today when Secretary Blinken hosted High

Representative Josep Borrell of the EU

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR PRICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** On North Korea, UN sanctions monitors reported to the Security Council that cyber attacks on cryptocurrency exchanges and financial institutions by North Korea were an important revenue source for North Korea to fund its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. What is the United States doing to try and stop this, and does the U.S. believe North Korea's receiving any outside help to help carry out these cyber attacks?

**MR PRICE:** I don't have any assessment to offer from here in terms of outside support or assistance that North Korea may be receiving. What I can say generally without speaking to any specific report at this time is that North Korea's activity and behavior in cyberspace has long been a serious concern of the United States. We have in the past disclosed and attributed malicious attacks to the DPRK – the attack in 2014, I believe it was, that the DPRK perpetrated against a private American company, a destructive attack against Sony may be an instructive case in point for some of the capabilities and some of the behavior that the DPRK has exhibited in cyberspace.

So it is not just the DPRK's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs. It is – it is not just its record on human rights. There are other profound concerns we have, including its behavior in cyberspace.

Yes, Ben. Welcome to – yeah.

**QUESTION:** With the restoration – with the restoration of the sanctions waiver on Iran, which is akin to lifting sanctions in the sense that it enriches them to a certain degree —

**MR PRICE:** No, it does not, Ben.

**QUESTION:** But wasn't that —

**MR PRICE:** But it – that's not true. It does not do that.

**QUESTION:** Well, was the restoration of the sanctions waiver in any way an incentive to get them back to the table and continue negotiations?



**MR PRICE:** So to be very clear, what you said was not true. The issuance of the so-called IFCA waiver in no way enriches Iran. This is about two things. This is about nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear safety. I would suspect most reasonable observers would agree that both of these things are in our vital national interest regardless of what happens with the JCPOA, if we're able to achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA or if we're not. We decided to renew and to restore this sanctions waiver to do one thing, and that is to enable third-party participation in nuclear non-proliferation and safety projects in Iran, owing to the growing proliferation concerns we have, in particular with respect to the increasing stockpiles of enriched uranium in Iran, the stockpiles that have grown following the last administration's decision to abandon the JCPOA.

Absent this waiver, the sort of detailed technical discussions with third parties regarding the disposition of stockpiles and other activities of non-proliferation value, they couldn't take place. The Trump administration, as you know, provided a similar waiver for years even after its foolish decision to leave the JCPOA, precisely because the last administration recognized the non-proliferation value of these waivers. I don't know that I've quoted Secretary Pompeo before from here, but Secretary Pompeo said about this waiver, quote, "This decision will help...reduce proliferation risks."

So additionally, the technical discussions facilitated by the waiver are necessary in the final weeks of JCPOA talks, as the waiver itself would be essential if we were be in a position – to be in a position to – if Iran were to resume compliance with its nuclear commitments. But again, even if talks do not culminate in a mutual return to compliance, these sorts of technical discussions could still contribute to our non-proliferation goals.

Non-proliferation, nuclear safety – these things may not mean a lot to a whole lot of people. So just to give you a few examples of activities that these waivers – this waiver would cover: for example, the modernization of the Arak reactor based on the design approved by the JCPOA, the conversion of the reactor to a much less proliferation-sensitive design. This waiver would approve the preparation and modification of the Fordow facility for stable isotope production. It would remove a potential impediment to efforts to end uranium enrichment at Fordow, as Iran committed to do under the JCPOA. It would facilitate the transfer outside Iran of enriched uranium to result in a reduction in Iran's stockpile to no more than 300 kilograms of up to 3.67 percent enriched LEU.

I could go on, but the point is that this waiver is not about providing Iran with funds. This waiver is about what is manifestly in our nonproliferation interests, in our – in service of nonproliferation safety to the United States, to our partners and allies around the world.

**QUESTION:** Can you talk about the timing of it, though, and why the decision was taken on Friday?

**MR PRICE:** Well —

**QUESTION:** Did it have anything to do with —

**MR PRICE:** Well, the fact is if we are in a position to resume compliance with the JCPOA, this waiver will need to be in place in order to effect some of the steps to make Iran's nuclear program less dangerous. If we are not in a position to achieve a mutual return to compliance, these are still – these steps are still in our interest.

**QUESTION:** What makes you think that that next step that they are – that we're one step closer to rejoining the JCPOA then?

**MR PRICE:** I didn't say that we were. I'm saying that this prepares us in the event we are able to achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA. This could still very much go one of two ways: a mutual return to compliance if Iran is in a position and willing and able to make the sort of political commitments necessary; or the alternatives that we've talked about in some less detail – detail but that we still talked about.

**QUESTION:** Ned, are you – that long list of things that you said that these waivers give, you're saying that there's no benefit to Iran in any of that?

**MR PRICE:** I am saying that the net benefit of this is a nonproliferation benefit for us.

**QUESTION:** Iran gets nothing out of it?

**MR PRICE:** When you say sanctions waiver —

**QUESTION:** I'm not talking about – hold on a second.

**MR PRICE:** Matt, you don't need to raise your voice. You don't —

**QUESTION:** But you're the one – you're the one who – you guys are the ones who said you were restoring the waivers, right? Okay. So if Iran really gets no benefit at all out of this, then why even bother?

**MR PRICE:** Why bother? I just explained to Ben. Because if —

**QUESTION:** No, well, you – tell me why Iran doesn't benefit from this.

**MR PRICE:** Matt, this is something that redounds —

**QUESTION:** You're talking about – you're assuming that everyone thinks that sanctions relief equals dollars —

**MR PRICE:** Well, that was the question.

**QUESTION:** — going to Iran.

**MR PRICE:** The question was you just waived —

**QUESTION:** No.

**MR PRICE:** It was.

**QUESTION:** That wasn't really the question.

**MR PRICE:** It was.

**QUESTION:** That was the way you interpreted the question.

**MR PRICE:** You can refer to the transcript.

**QUESTION:** So sanctions relief does not necessarily mean only dollar bills flying across the table into Iran – into the Iranian treasury's coffers, does it? Or is —

**MR PRICE:** In this case, it will allow Iran to undertake nuclear nonproliferation and safety activities that would otherwise be proscribed.

**QUESTION:** Yes, which is a benefit to Iran that it was not getting before.

**MR PRICE:** The fact is, Matt, that what is in our nonproliferation interest can also be, in some ways, in Iran's interest. That doesn't change the fact that it is manifestly in our interest.

**QUESTION:** Do they – so do they get a benefit of —

**MR PRICE:** Matt, I was referring to the sort —

**QUESTION:** Do they get any benefit out of this or not?

**MR PRICE:** It is – some of these steps redound to their interest.

**QUESTION:** Do they get any benefit or not?

**MR PRICE:** This is in our interest to do, which is precisely why the last —

**QUESTION:** Is it in Iran's interest as well?

**MR PRICE:** — which is why the last administration did it. In 2018, Secretary Pompeo, as I quoted before, said precisely this decision will help reduce proliferation —

**QUESTION:** And two years later – and two years later when he rescinded the waivers, he said that – he accused of Iran of taking – of participating in nuclear blackmail and said that they weren't – that they weren't deserving of the benefits that accrue to them under this.

You're stuck on this idea that – and interesting that you used the word "enrich" because I think you're talking about it in terms of money, but enrichment obviously has a different kind of meaning when it comes to Iran. But I don't understand how you can say that Iran gets no benefit and that this isn't some kind of sanctions relief that you – that the administration has offered to Iran before it has made any of its own concessions.

**MR PRICE:** Matt, the question I was responding to took this in a vein —

**QUESTION:** Okay. Well, then, forget about the question you were —

**MR PRICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** — you think you were responding to. Answer my question: Does Iran benefit at all from the waivers that were signed?

**MR PRICE:** You will need to ask the Iranian Government whether they think this is a benefit to them. We know —

**QUESTION:** Well, who do you think this benefits? Just you?

**MR PRICE:** We know this is of benefit to us. The ability of third-party entities to work on nuclear nonproliferation projects —

**QUESTION:** Okay, I'm sorry, now is the U.S. —

**MR PRICE:** — and nuclear safety projects in Iran in the face of our growing concerns, nonproliferation and nuclear safety concerns – that is in our benefit, yes.

**QUESTION:** The people that this benefits, in fact, are actually Russian, Chinese, European companies, right? Is that what you're saying?

**MR PRICE:** Matt, I am saying that it is manifestly to our advantage —

**QUESTION:** And not Iran's?

**MR PRICE:** It benefits us to —

**QUESTION:** Okay. Well, if you can argue that —

**MR PRICE:** — be able to address nuclear safety and nuclear nonproliferation concerns on Iran.

**QUESTION:** If you're able to argue that Iran gets no benefit out of this successfully, which you haven't convinced me of, but anyway – but if you're able to, then good on you. Now, do you think that these waivers trigger INARA?

**MR PRICE:** Matt, we have a robust conversation with Congress on progress in Vienna. We have briefed Congress regularly on the discussions. I have every expectations that those briefings will continue in the days and weeks ahead.

**QUESTION:** Well, do you believe that this triggers the requirements of the Iran Nuclear Review Act?

**MR PRICE:** What I can say is that we've had conversations with Congress about requirements should we be in a position to resume compliance with the JCPOA, but I don't have anything for you on these particular – this IFCA waiver.

**QUESTION:** No, not IFCA. INARA.

**MR PRICE:** Right, but you're saying "these" in response to IFCA.

**QUESTION:** Yeah.

**MR PRICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. Well, so you're aware of the requirements of INARA, right? That any agreement reached with Iran has to be submitted. Are you saying that it did trigger INARA and your notification to Congress on Friday fulfills the requirements of INARA?

**MR PRICE:** No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying —

**QUESTION:** Oh, well, then why did you even notify Congress in the first place?

**MR PRICE:** We regularly notify Congress when it comes to —

**QUESTION:** (Laughter.) Okay. Well – so did it trigger INARA or not?

**MR PRICE:** Matt, when it – we will carefully consider the facts and circumstances when it comes to any potential U.S. return to the JCPOA to determine the implications under INARA.

**QUESTION:** So you don't think that this falls under the scope of INARA.

**MR PRICE:** I have no reason to believe that this was done pursuant to INARA. This is something we, as I said before, we regularly engage with Congress when it comes to developments in Vienna —

**QUESTION:** Well, it's a technical issue. I get that, and probably boring the hell out of everybody, but it is an important one, because if it – even if the notification wasn't done under INARA, do you think that the waivers trigger the – trigger the INARA requirements for any agreement with Iran related to its nuclear program? These do relate to its nuclear program, right?

**MR PRICE:** This is, as you said, a technical question, so we'll get you a technical answer.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Ned, why shouldn't Iran benefit – why shouldn't Iran benefit from the waiver? I mean, I thought the whole purpose of negotiations is so everybody goes back to the deal and sanctions will be lifted, Iran will pull back from any nuclear threat and so on, and everything will be hunky-dory. So why is that such a bad thing if Iran benefits?

**MR PRICE:** You'll have to ask —

**QUESTION:** No, I'm asking you because you – you're the one who's —

**MR PRICE:** I am not speaking to what Iran may be saying about this; I am speaking to the benefits that we accrue.

**QUESTION:** Isn't that the incentive for Iran to go on in good faith in these negotiations and so on?

**MR PRICE:** Well, the basic formula of the JCPOA, leaving aside Matt's questioning about these specific measures, is in fact permanent, verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

Francesco

**QUESTION:** Do you have any indication that the talks resume tomorrow, that the Iranian negotiators are coming back empowered by the political decision you were expecting for —

**MR PRICE:** We will have a better idea of that once the talks resume.

**QUESTION:** Wendy Sherman will be in Vienna for an OSCE meeting tomorrow. Will she meet with the U.S.-Iran team, any of the P5+1, or even the Iranians while there?

**MR PRICE:** She's taking part virtually.

**QUESTION:** Oh, okay. Thanks.

**MR PRICE:** Thank you all very much.

**QUESTION:** One more – sorry.

**MR PRICE:** Okay, sure.

**QUESTION:** Is – are the Russians taking a little bit longer to respond to this – the U.S. proposal than anticipated?

**MR PRICE:** You'll have to ask them. I —

**QUESTION:** No sense of any indigestion as they're processing this —

**MR PRICE:** You will have to ask them about their gastrointestinal fortitude.

Yeah.

**QUESTION:** Can you just tell us what the AUKUS call that is on the schedule for this afternoon, I think, is about?

**MR PRICE:** So we'll have an opportunity – I do expect we'll have a readout of the call. But in advance of the Secretary's travel to the Indo-Pacific, this is just another opportunity for him to have a conversation with our AUKUS partners. They will, I suspect, discuss the work currently underway and the progress made in the implementation of some of the initiatives that we have talked about in the context of AUKUS. I don't want to get ahead of that readout, but I think you will see one late this afternoon.



**QUESTION:** It's the first follow-up at this level since AUKUS was announced, right?

**MR PRICE:** It's been several months.

Yes, Ben.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any comment on China using a Uyghur to light the Olympic flame and what the State Department thinks?

**MR PRICE:** Not specifically beyond the point that we've repeatedly made, that the PRC has sought to – the PRC has sought to disguise the true reality of what is going on, what has gone on in Xinjiang – that is the ongoing genocide, those are the crimes against humanity, that's the human rights abuses that have taken place there. But when it comes to their motives for choosing this specific individual, I'd have to refer you to them.

Yes.

**QUESTION:** Will Rob Malley be in Vienna tomorrow for the start of the talks?

**MR PRICE:** He is traveling to Vienna today. Thank you all very much.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:41 p.m.)

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