

BRIEFING ROOM

Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan

JULY 12, 2022 • PRESS BRIEFINGS

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

3:50 P.M. EDT

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Good afternoon, everybody. Good afternoon.

Q Good afternoon.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you. All right. Today we have Jake Sullivan, the President's National Security Advisor. Jake is here to preview the President's upcoming trip to the Middle East, where he will build on a new and more promising chapter of America's engagement in the region.

And I'm going to let Jake take it away. And also, he'll take some questions afterwards. Jake, it's all yours.

MR. SULLIVAN: Thank you, Karine. And thanks, everybody. I'm going to lay out a little bit of the context for this trip, make a couple of comments on tomorrow's bilateral meeting with President López Obrador of Mexico, and then I'll be happy to take your questions. But I appreciate you bearing with me as I try to lay out some of the elements of the President's thinking as we head into this very important trip.

Tomorrow, President Biden will depart on a trip to Israel, the West Bank, and Saudi Arabia, where he will attend a major Middle Eastern summit. This trip will reinforce a vital American role in a strategically consequential region. And also, it will reinforce that our role is different today than it was 20 years ago on the eve of the war in Iraq.

This trip comes after a series of engagements with Indo-Pacific leaders in May, with Latin American leaders at the Summit of the Americas in early June, and with European leaders at the G7 and NATO Summits in late June. It is his first trip to the Middle East as President.

It is precisely because the world is becoming more geopolitically competitive, especially in the Indo-Pacific and Europe, that we need to remain intensively engaged in the Middle East. The Middle East is deeply interwoven with the rest of the world. And if we can act now to create a more peaceful and stable region, it will pay dividends for the American national interests and for the American people for years to come.

President Biden's fundamental objectives when it comes to the Middle East are straightforward: a region with more stability and fewer wars that could draw the United States in, a region that is less hospitable to terrorism that threatens Americans, a region that is helping address global energy security at a moment when Russia's war against Ukraine is roiling global energy markets, a region where no foreign power can dominate or gain strategic advantage over the United States, a region that is making progress towards greater human rights and greater human dignity.

And despite ongoing challenges, the Middle East President Biden will be visiting is more stable than the one we inherited 18 months ago.

We inherited a war in Yemen that was causing widespread death and suffering. We now have had more than three months of a ceasefire in Yemen — the longest peace in seven years.

In Iraq, we kept up pressure on ISIS, significantly degrading their capabilities, including by taking out its emir, allowing us to end the U.S. combat mission and transition our military presence in Iraq to focus on training Iraqis.

We've reunited our partners to ensure that it's Iran, not the United States, that is isolated until it returns to the nuclear deal. And the frequency of Iranian-sponsored attacks against our forces in Iraq and Syria has dropped dramatically.

We've reestablished diplomatic ties with the Palestinians that had basically severed under our predecessor. Working with Congress, we've restored approximately \$500 million in support for Palestinians. And we've reaffirmed unequivocal U.S. support for a two-state solution, which had come into question over the previous four years. And under President Biden's leadership, we helped end a war in Gaza, which easily could have lasted months, in just 11 days.

In Saudi Arabia, we've reversed the blank-check policy that we inherited from the previous administration, while continuing to work with Saudi Arabia on critical priorities for the

American people. We released the intelligence community report on the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. We issued new sanctions, including on the Rapid Intervention Force that was implicated in that murder.

Our diplomacy with Saudi Arabia is now delivering results, including a truce in Yemen, a more integrated GCC, progress on energy security, and security cooperation against threats from Iran.

Our partnership with Israel is strong across the board. We passed the largest support package in Israel with the help of Congress — over \$4 billion — in American history. We're working closely across every dimension of the relationship — from finance and food security, to cyber and emerging technology, to intelligence and security cooperation. And President Biden's deep personal commitment to the U.S.-Israel relationship and to the relationship between Israelis and Americans will be on full display this week.

In sum, the region is less pressurized and more integrated, with countries increasingly setting aside both old and more recent disagreements to work on practical initiatives in energy, technology, infrastructure, and more.

We are clear-eyed that the region remains full of challenges and threats from Iran, from terrorist groups that still operate in a number of countries; challenges in the ongoing conflict in Syria; challenges to human rights and human freedom. This is why the President believes there is no substitute for the power of face-to-face diplomacy.

In meetings on this trip, President Biden will seek to sustain and strengthen the fragile but real ceasefire in Yemen; deepen Israel's integration into the region; provide material support to the Palestinian people while protecting the vision of a two-state solution; coordinate on the multi-faceted threat posed by Iran; advance energy security and food security objectives for the U.S. and our allies in the face of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, while promoting a clean energy transition over time; enlisting support for Middle Eastern partners for significant initiatives in technology and infrastructure; and publicly and privately advocating for universal values including progress on human rights and political reform.

In Israel, the President will meet with the Prime Minister, the President, the leader of the opposition, as well as attend a reception with a number of other key Israeli leaders and public figures. He will also have the opportunity to receive a briefing on Israel's missile defense capabilities, including the U.S.-supported Iron Dome and a new laser-enabled system called Iron Beam. He will pay his respects at Yad Vashem. And he will hold a four-way virtual summit with the leaders of Israel, the UAE, and India, with a focus on food security.

President Biden will also meet with President Abbas and attend a health event with Palestinian civil society.

In Saudi Arabia, the President will meet with the Saudi leadership with an aim to strengthen our partnership and also hold bilateral meetings with a number of other Middle Eastern leaders, before closing the trip with the summit with the GCC+3. At that summit, he will make a major statement on the Biden administration's strategy — his vision — for the Middle East region.

There will be other engagements in a crowded and fast-paced schedule, and we will share them with you in due course.

In fact, before we even leave, tomorrow morning President Biden will meet with President López Obrador here at the White House — the second time the two leaders will meet here — to build on the significant progress made at the Summit of the Americas, where Mexico expressed support for the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity and joined 20 other countries in adopting the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.

We expect the two leaders to discuss their common vision for North America and common efforts to address global challenges, including Russia's war in Ukraine.

So, thank you for your patience, and I would now be happy to take your questions.

Yeah.

Q Jake, has the President reached out to Jamal Khashoggi's family ahead of his trip to Saudi?

MR. SULLIVAN: We have had contact with Jamal Khashoggi's family. The President has not himself spoken with them, but he has been focused on this issue from the beginning.

And as he said when he took office and as we have stuck by since then, our goal has been to recalibrate but not rupture the relationship with Saudi Arabia, to end the blank-check policy, and to seek accountability. That's why we released the intelligence community's report on the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and it's why we have issued 76 visa bans, in addition to sanctioning the Rapid Intervention Force.

Yes.

Q But in your remarks, you mentioned human rights multiple times. You know, during the campaign, the President said Saudi should pay a price. He referred to them as making them a

pariah state. When it comes right down to it, isn't this trip proof that strategic interests, including oil and gas, when it comes right down to it, are always going to override something like human rights?

MR. SULLIVAN: America's values — human rights — are a strategic interest of the United States. So is energy security, so is stopping terrorism, so is seeking peace in a place like Yemen.

So we are trying to do multiple things all at once to advance along a number of different tracks. One of those tracks is, in fact, ending the blank-check policy. And as I said before, the basic thrust and purpose of our policy with respect to Saudi Arabia has been to recalibrate the relationship but not rupture it. We have stayed true to that from the beginning of this administration.

The President believes that he can deliver concrete results for the American people, for the interests of America's national security. One of those is the horrific war in Yemen, where I've stood before you before and been asked questions — very tough, but fair questions — about what the United States was doing to bring peace to Yemen and what a high priority that was.

We are now heading into the fourth month of a fragile but real ceasefire, the longest peace since the war began more than seven years ago. That is a genuine result of both intensive diplomacy in the Middle East and intensive engagement by American leaders starting with President Biden. That is just one of multiple priorities that every American should be able to agree can help contribute to a more stable, more just, more prosperous region that's fundamentally in our interests. And that's why we're going to the Middle East.

Yes.

Q Thank you, Jake. Two questions. One, will the President be photographed shaking hands with the Crown Prince or meeting with him while in Saudi?

MR. SULLIVAN: The President will have the opportunity to have a bilateral program that will involve the King, the Crown Prince, other ministers of the Saudi government. And in terms of the precise modalities, I'll leave that to the folks who are actually organizing the trip.

Q And as you've been planning this trip, has the President expressed any regret for the language that he used to describe Saudi Arabia on the campaign trail?

MR. SULLIVAN: The President has not expressed regret about his statements. What the President has been focused on is his view that the United States has important interests to

advance and protect, including in partnership with Saudi Arabia. And, among other things, we have to work on increasing the prospect for peace in the region; for Israel's integration into the region; for the war in Yemen, as I mentioned before; for energy and food security; and for many other things.

And he also has a long and consistent record — going back to his days as senator, including his years as Vice President, including his time as President — where human rights is going to remain a feature of his agenda and an important feature of his agenda. And it will be on display while we're on this trip as well.

Yes.

Q Thanks, Jake. Now, the President said at NATO that he would be asking GCC countries about increasing oil production. But the Saudis and UAE have indicated that their capacity to increase production is limited. So what does the administration view as possible as far as an output increase from those countries on this trip if that comes up?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, first, we've already seen OPEC take a meaningful step with respect to the increase in oil production in the months of July and August. That was a positive step; we welcomed it.

And we will have the opportunity, among this very broad agenda, to talk about energy security with the leaders of the OPEC nations in the Middle East, just as we discussed energy security when he was on his trips in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific. And we will see what results come from that. Ultimately, that will be up to the OPEC countries to determine.

And so I don't have anything to say from this podium right now because those discussions are best, you know, confined behind closed doors. But we do believe there is a capacity for further steps that could be taken. And we will see how that unfolds as we go.

Yeah.

Q So you're not asking for a specific figure as far as —

MR. SULLIVAN: I'm sorry?

Q You're not asking them for a specific figure as far as output?

MR. SULLIVAN: In terms of specific figures, all I will say is that we will convey our general view — as we have, as I have publicly from this podium — that we believe that there needs to be

adequate supply in the global market to protect the global economy and to protect the American consumer at the pump. We'll always advocate for that. We'll advocate for that publicly. We'll advocate for that privately. We'll coordinate with leaders around the world, including in the Middle East, on that issue.

Yeah.

Q Thank you, Jake. Just to follow up on Jordan's question, does the President believe right now that Saudi Arabia is pumping enough oil to bring gas prices down?

MR. SULLIVAN: So I'm not going to get into a specific characterization on what constitutes "enough." What I will say is the President believes that the price of gas is too high and that we need to do more with respect to global energy supplies. And he will take every step in his power, both here at home and in terms of his diplomatic engagement in the world, to try to bring that about.

Q But just more broadly on the trip's purpose, do you see any potential to ease or smooth the relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia on this trip?

MR. SULLIVAN: It is our hope and expectation that as we look out into the future, we can help facilitate Israel's deeper integration into the region across the board.

Specifically with respect to Israel and Saudi Arabia, I'm not going to get ahead of very intensive work that will be done in the course of this trip. Any normalization of any kind would be a long process. But looking for progress and momentum in that direction is certainly something we are focused on as we head off to the Middle East.

Q Jake, you mentioned "until Iran returns to the nuclear deal." Is there a deadline that Iran has been given here?

MR. SULLIVAN: We have not marked a date on the calendar. We have indicated that we believe there is a deal on the table. It is a deal that we're backing, that our European partners are backing that is available to Iran, and Iran should step forward and take that deal.

If they don't, we're not standing still. Even as we speak, we've already introduced two rounds of sanctions to crack down on their effort to evade the existing sanctions regime. We are curbing their ability to smuggle oil, for example, through the Quds Force and other entities within Iran. And we'll keep doing that.

So as far as we're concerned, Iran has a choice: It can either come back on a compliance-for-compliance basis to the JCPOA, or it will face increasing pressure from the United States and increasing isolation from the international community to include a resolution at the IAEA Board of Governors that garnered the support of more than 30 nations.

Yeah.

Q Jake, can you confirm any of the details about — you know, you spoke about Israel's greater integration into the region. We certainly heard reports about the idea that there are — there are some sort of negotiations that would allow Israel commercial flights to fly over Saudi Arabia. Is that something that you could sort of confirm for us?

MR. SULLIVAN: I've got nothing to confirm or preview here. What I will say is that this broad topic of Israel's integration into the region, and steps that we can take in that direction, will be a feature of this trip. And I will leave the rest of it to the President as he embarks on his engagements both in Israel and in Saudi Arabia.

I will point out that the fact that the President himself will be flying from Israel to Jeddah is itself a meaningful step and an unusual step. And it shows the kind of promise that greater integration could hold.

But in terms of the specific kinds of steps you've talked about, I would simply say: Nothing from the podium today. And let's see how things develop over the course of this week.

Yeah.

Q You talk about the importance of personal diplomacy as part of the reason for going. There are risks for the President politically to go to Saudi Arabia, with an expectation among the public that maybe there will be a specific deliverable when it comes to gas prices and so forth, and supply. What is the burden on the President to come home with something in that category?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, I — it's up to you to characterize things like "burdens on the President." What I can say is what the President intends to do. He intends to use every tool in his toolbox to try to create adequate global energy supplies and to bring the price of gas down for American working families at the pump.

And that will be measured over time: Can we get that price down and can we keep it down? And I don't think it's going to be measured on Friday or Saturday of this week; I think it will be measured over the weeks and months to come. And, there, we will sustain intensive

engagement in our effort to ensure that, at the end of the day, we're having a positive impact on the price of oil and thereby a positive impact on the price of gas.

And I think the President sees this as an important component of his engagement, not just in the Middle East, but in his previous summits as well, and as one component of a broader agenda that includes peace, security, technology, preventing a nuclear Iran, and so much else that I've described today.

Yeah.

Q Jake, thanks for this. Is the administration considering lifting its ban on offensive weapon sales to Saudi Arabia dependent on progress that the country makes with its war — ending its war with Yemen?

MR. SULLIVAN: So you may recall that when this administration came in, we imposed restrictions on the supply of offensive weapons as part of our effort to help bring about an end to the war in Yemen. And right now, there's no — nothing on the table to lift that ban. Right now, we're focused on strengthening and sustaining what is a fragile but real ceasefire, not make any fundamental changes to our weapons policy.

Q Secondly, if I may, former Governor Bill Richardson is planning to travel to Russia for talks aimed at finding a deal that would free Brittney Griner. Is this something that the White House is aware of? Have you had talks with Richardson about the trip?

MR. SULLIVAN: We have had communication from the National Security Council to former Governor Richardson. I won't comment on his travel or what he intends to do. What I will say is that President Biden is laser-focused on a government-to-government solution to this issue.

As he indicated to Brittney Griner in the letter that he wrote to her, we are working directly with the Russian government, through appropriate channels, to try to bring a speedy resolution not just to her case but to Paul Whelan's case as well. And we will continue to work until those two unjustly detained Americans and all unjustly detained Americans and hostages are home safely.

Yeah.

Q Thanks, Jake. Does the President plan to directly bring up the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in his meeting with — that will include the conference?

MR. SULLIVAN: So I'm not going to characterize the — what the President will say privately in those sessions. I'll let the President do that — you know, have the opportunity to have his engagement on human rights-related issues and other issues. And then, of course, you'll have the opportunity to ask him about that after the trip occurs.

Yes.

Q Is Ukraine losing the war now, Jake? Is Ukraine losing the war?

MR. SULLIVAN: Sorry, I'll come back to you on that question. But I think just so that I'm keeping regular order and not letting people just shout, we'll come — but before we end the briefing, I'll come to you.

Q Thank you.

MR. SULLIVAN: Yeah.

Q Thanks, Jake. As the President goes to the Middle East, simultaneously, U.S. senators are being briefed on the importance — national security-wise — of investing in semiconductor production in the U.S. If we don't pass that, what does that say to Israel and Saudi Arabia and other allies? What are the risks that we're inviting? And does it set the President's agenda in the Middle East back?

MR. SULLIVAN: The national security stakes for passing this Bipartisan Innovation Act — what's called USICA in the Senate and COMPETES in the House — are very high. America's technological edge, our innovation edge, our capacity to invest in the next generation of leading technologies, the next generation of leading weapons is bound up in our ability to ensure that we have a secure and reliant, resilient supply chain for semiconductors. And that means getting the kinds of incentives and structures in place to increase semiconductor manufacturing, including the most sophisticated chips here in the United States.

That's why there's bipartisan support for this bill. That's why Democrats and Republicans have both rallied around the notion that for us to compete effectively with China, for us to be able to get the Javelins to Ukraine that we need to get to them — there are more than 20 semiconductors in every single Javelin — we need this bill.

And it has been disappointing to us that Leader McConnell has been playing politics with national security. There are both Republicans and Democrats who are willing to step up and pass this, and we believe it should happen fast.

Q Should the House just pass the Senate bill and get it over with?

MR. SULLIVAN: There is a conference ongoing, and there is a pathway, in our view, to a bill that a strong, bipartisan majority of both the House and the Senate can get behind, that can be signed into law by President Biden, and that he can begin to execute in a way that enhances America's national security, not to mention our economic competitiveness at the same time.

Yeah.

Q So Secretary of State Tony Blinken visit Tokyo. He said he wrote a letter from the President to the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. So can you talk about the letter? It's a message from the President to the former Prime Minister Shinzo's family.

MR. SULLIVAN: So, the letter that he wrote was a private message, so it wouldn't be appropriate for me to read it out. I will say that President Biden put out a very heartfelt statement that expressed his sympathies to the people of Japan, his deep sympathies and his — his heartfelt emotional connection for the loss of a family member to former Prime Minister Abe's family. And for him, that came from the heart.

And he went over to the Japanese Embassy and signed the guestbook. And I went with him. And actually, he sat at that table and wrote a message for several minutes — a very long message to the Japanese people in that book, in addition to the private letter that he handed to the ambassador to be taken back to Tokyo.

So this is something that the President cares about, as a statesman, as an American President. It's also something that he cares about deeply as a human being, on behalf of the Prime Minister — the former Prime Minister's family, but especially on behalf of all of the people of Japan in their time of mourning.

Q If possible, will the President go to Tokyo sometime soon? We don't know if (inaudible) funeral yet but is it possible for the President to go to Tokyo sometime soon?

MR. SULLIVAN: I don't have anything to announce about any travel to Tokyo in the near term. But, you know, if we do have anything to share in terms of the American delegation, if there is a state funeral, we'll let you know.

Just coming back to the question, James, that you asked earlier on —

Q Thank you.

MR. SULLIVAN: — on Ukraine: Russia has already substantially failed to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine. Its strategic objective was to take Kyiv, the capital; to end Ukraine as a country; to eliminate Ukrainian identity from the map; and to subsume Ukraine to within Russia.

They have failed at that. Kyiv stands. Kharkiv stands. Odessa stands. The major cities of Ukraine across much of the country are in Ukrainian hands and are being ably and bravely defended by the Ukrainian military with the support of the United States and other NATO Allies as well as countries around the world.

So, when you take a step back and look at the trajectory of this conflict: What Vladimir Putin set out to do, he has failed to do and he will continue to fail in his ability to achieve his ultimate objectives because of the bravery of the Ukrainian people.

Now, it is certainly the case that Russia has been able to grind out, kilometer by kilometer, inch by inch, some territory in the east. And the Ukrainians have made Russia pay a dear price for that. And the sanctions have made Russia pay a dear price for that.

And we will continue to work with the Ukrainian military and Ukrainian government on a strategy that ultimately achieves their objectives, both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. And as President Biden said when we were at the NATO summit just 10 days ago, “We will do that for as long as it takes.”

Yes.

Q Do you still assess — do you still assess, Jake, that President Putin is receiving a sanitized or otherwise inaccurate fact set from his own advisors about the state of what’s going on the ground in Ukraine?

MR. SULLIVAN: I don’t have an update for you, standing here today, on our intelligence assessment on Vladimir Putin’s consumption of information, but we’ll try to get that to you.

Yeah.

Q Thank you so much, Jake. So, today, Brazil’s President Bolsonaro said that a deal with Russia is close to buy much cheaper oil from Moscow, and other countries from — the Greeks are doing the same. So does this undermine the Western sanctions — the White House efforts to impose costs on Russia? And what is the White House reaction to that?

And another question. Last week, some Democrats in the House proposed an amendment to defense — to the defense budgets to cut security assistance to Brazil if the Brazilian Armed Forces interfere in the Brazilian election in October? Does the White House support such an amendment?

MR. SULLIVAN: I have not actually seen that amendment, so I'd have to take a look at it before commenting on it.

With respect to the question about the purchase of oil, you will have seen at the G7 — the G7 leaders discussed imposing a price cap on Russian oil in order to have it be trans- — transferred on ships carrying Western insurance. A price cap, meaning that countries would have to agree to pay less for Russian oil than what the global market price is.

Q Mr. Sullivan?

MR. SULLIVAN: If it turns out that countries are imposing their own price cap and it is a substantial denial of revenue to Russia in terms of their ability to sell oil, that is not the failure of sanctions; that's actually the success of economic pressure, because it is driving down revenues for Moscow.

And so, from our perspective — I don't know about the specifics of what President Bolsonaro said today, but our fundamental goal, with respect to approaching Russia's sale of oil onto the global market is twofold: One, reduce Putin's revenues. And, two, do so while imposing the minimum amount of harm on consumers on the pump. That's our goal. That's what we're going to keep trying to do.

Yes, go ahead.

Q Thank you, sir. I wanted to —

Q And will there be any repercussion to Brazil or other countries who are buying the oil, Jake?

Q — I wanted to follow up quickly. Moment ago, you said that the United States was going to be working with Ukraine to craft “a strategy that ultimately achieves their objective both on the battlefield and at the negotiation table.” You also noted that the major cities in Ukraine stand.

But as you and the President work with Ukrainian leaders to figure out what that strategy is for both battlefield and negotiation table, if Ukrainians decide that they want to claw back

“kilometer by kilometer, inch by inch,” the land that has been taken by Russia, will the United States have their back?

MR. SULLIVAN: So, we are in near daily contact with Ukrainians on the question of how to both deal with defending against Russian advances and be able to reclaim some of the territory that has been taken from them on a timetable that they are kind of working through. Those conversations are happening in military-to-military channels, and they’re also happening at the political level so we all have a comprehensive understanding.

I’m not going to read out exactly what the details of those conversations are. I will only say that we believe that the fundamental purpose of our strategy is to put the Ukrainians in as strong a position as possible on the battlefield so that they are in as strong a position as possible at the negotiating table when diplomacy comes.

And as President Zelenskyy himself has said: Ultimately, this conflict will have to be pursued through diplomacy. And that’s where the United States’ thrust and purpose — that’s where the nature of our policy stands and will go.

Q And is there any limiting principle for the United States, in terms of either time or money?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, first, we’ve imposed limiting principles in terms of exactly the types of systems we are prepared to provide and for reasons related to seeking to deal with a circumstance in which some American capabilities, in our view, represent a benefit-risk analysis that runs against their provision.

But from the point of view of a limiting principle on time, the President was absolutely clear on that. He said, “As long as it takes. He meant, “As long as it takes.” And that’s where the United States is prepared to stand. And we believe that’s where the broad global coalition of countries supporting Ukraine is prepared to go as well.

Yes.

Q Thanks, Jake. You mentioned, during the President’s trip to Israel, that one of the meetings he will be having is with the opposition leader. Can you talk a little bit about that meeting and why are they meeting and what does the President hope to accomplish?

MR. SULLIVAN: So it’s standard protocol for an American president to meet with leaders across the Israeli political spectrum, and the reason is simple: It’s because the President — this President and previous presidents have wanted to display that the relationship between the United States and Israel transcends politics. It transcends parties. It doesn’t matter who’s in

charge in Washington or who's in charge in Israel.

What matters is that we have a foundational, ironclad commitment to the security of the State of Israel and that our two peoples are joined in a common vision for the future.

That's what he's going to want to put on display, and that is the message that he will convey through the totality of his meetings in Israel.

Yeah.

Q You mentioned —

MR. SULLIVAN: Last question, and then I'll move out. So — go ahead.

Q You mentioned earlier that Russia had failed to achieve its objectives, in particular taking Kyiv. Do you — are you confident then that, even if this war extends months, years in the future, that Russia will not be able to take Kyiv?

MR. SULLIVAN: So we do have confidence that the bravery of the Ukrainians and the support of the West to Ukraine will enable Ukraine to effectively defend and sustain its capital.

And I would also point out, when I talked about the severe costs that Russia has had to endure on the battlefield as it tries to grind out territory in the east, this is coming at a cost to the sustainment of its own weapons.

And I'll just give you one example before I leave, which is an example that I think is pretty newsworthy and noteworthy, and that is that our information indicates that the Iranian government is preparing to provide Russia with up to several hundred UAVs, including weapons-capable UAVs, on an expedi- — expedited timeline.

Our information further indicates that Iran is preparing to train Russian forces to use these UAVs with initial training sessions slated to begin as soon as early July.

It's unclear whether Iran has delivered any of these UAVs to Russia already. But this is just one example of how Russia is looking to countries like Iran for capabilities that are also being used, I might add, or have been used before we got the ceasefire in place in Yemen, to attack Saudi Arabia.

So, from our perspective, we will continue to do our part to help sustain the effective defense

of Ukraine and to help the Ukrainians show that the Russian effort to try to wipe Ukraine off the map cannot succeed.

And I'll leave you guys. Thanks, guys.

Q Thanks, Jake.

Q Thank you.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. I have a few things at the top.

So, on Wednesday, we will have new CPI inflation data, and we expect the headline number, which includes gas and food, to be highly elevated, mainly because gas prices were so elevated in June.

Gas and food prices continue to be heavily impacted by the war in Ukraine. And there are a few important points to keep in mind when we get this backwards-looking data:

First, June CPI data is already out of date because energy prices have come down substantially this month and are expected to fall further.

The average retail price of gas was 11 percent higher in June than it was in May. And the cost of gas in July is already down 7 percent from the June peak.

I have a chart here for you guys to — to see. The crude oil is the yellow. I'm sorry, the crude oil is the blue at the bottom, and the retail gasoline price is at the top. And you can see the difference there.

I would also note that even though gas prices shot up quickly when oil prices rose, they have not come down as quickly as oil has.

We continue to call on oil and gas companies to pass on their lower cost to consumers. American families should not be the first to pay and the last to benefit.

The President's number one economic priority is tackling inflation. And looking ahead, there are a number of reasons why we expect those high prices to ease over the coming months.

Saturday marked the one-year anniversary of President Biden's Executive Order to Promote Competition Across the American Economy.

This EO prompted a government-wide effort to help lower prices, raise wages, and encourage innovation. And one year in, we're extraordinarily proud of the progress we've made.

Just a few example on this is: The Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission have already scored big wins for Americans. They have ~~looked~~ [blocked] megamergers in the insurance and sugar industries, and stopped a defense contractor megamerger that would've cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

In just a few months, Americans with hearing loss will be able to buy hearing aids over the counter at a — at a drug store, instead of requiring a prescription, which could save them thousands of dollars.

And the Department of Agriculture is cracking down on the meat-processing industry and supporting new competitors so farmer — farmer and ranchers get a fair price.

Our administration will continue driving structural change to produce lower prices, higher wages, and to make our economy dynamic and competitive.

Following a — following a briefing from NASA, the President and the Vice President will unveil the first [full]-color images NASA's James Webb Space Telescope — the largest space telescope ever built. This is very cool.

The high-resolution images will show light captured from galaxies that are more than 13 billion years old, formed shortly after the Big Bang.

Thanks to the incredible NASA team, this work will help scientists answer some of the biggest open questions about how and why stars form and the habitability of other worlds as well.

And that is it. Josh, do you want to kick us — kick us off?

Q Sure. Thanks, Karine. Two subjects.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

Q First, how seriously is President Biden weighing a public health emergency regarding abortion access? And does he have any concerns about what kind of impact that emergency could have on access?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So, Jen Klein spoke about this when she was — when she joined the briefing room on Friday. And she is — for those who don't know, she is — she chairs the

Gender Policy Council, and she has been leading the effort along with other — other White House offices in — within the White House on our response to Dobbs decision.

But also — we have to also remember that we started working on this prior to that, prior even when the decision leaked, which is when S.B. 8 in Texas was passed.

So this is something that this administration has been very laser-focused on. But the team has been evaluating every option.

When we looked at declaring a public health emergency, we learned a couple of things — and she spoke to this as well; I'm just repeating what she said when she was in the briefing room, which is — one is: It — that it doesn't free very many resources. There's very little money left — about tens of thousands of dollars that are left because we have used it for other — for other reasons, in particular the COVID — our COVID-19 response, the monkeypox, which is an issue that we're dealing with right now that we have been very aggressive on dealing with. And also, it also doesn't release a significant amount of legal authority. And so that's why we haven't taken that action yet.

But as she has said and as the President has said, that everything is on the table; it doesn't mean that it's off the table. And we're going to try and figure out every meaningful action to move forward.

So, we haven't taken it off the table, but there are components of this potential decision that has kind of given us pause and made us think a little bit deeper about doing that.

Q And secondly, what's your message to gun control groups who say that today's event here at the White House was premature, given the additional efforts that they say are necessary?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So one of the things that I'll say about that is: So the President clearly welcomed the bipartisan bill on gun — gun reform, and he was proud to sign it. We had more than 2,000 people out on the South Lawn, many from different parts of the community; many families who have suffered from gun — gun violence personally, lost some loved ones; and folks who have been fighting for gun reform for a very long time; and also legislators and congressional members.

And so while he welcomed — while he has been proud to sign the bill, he understand that more can be done. He spoke about that in his speech today — in his remarks, specifically — talking about banning the assault weapon — something that he led back in 1994, which sunset 10 years later; this is something that he is still going to continue to fight for — high-capacity magazines. But we do believe and the President does believe that the bipartisan legislation that he signed

today on gun reform will start to save lives. And when you think about the red-flag laws, when you think about how that — when it is enacted, it has been effective. When you think — look at Democratic states and red states, it has been effective. When you think about this so-called boy — “the boyfriend loophole,” those things will help to save lives.

Do we need to do more? Absolutely. And he’s going to continue to do everything that he can, understand — and remembering that this is the President that has done more using executive action to deal with gun violence than any other President at this time in their administration.

Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q One question — or two questions, but one question on the trip: Does the President plan to hold a press conference after his meetings with the Saudis?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Right now, I believe — and we’ll have more to share — he has that one press conference in Israel. I don’t have anything else to share on — on what else we’ll — on what are the activities of the press conference — other activity — other press conferences he may have.

Q Okay. We would definitely appreciate one if you —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Understood. Understood.

Q — scheduled one to ask him about the visit.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Understood.

Q What was the President’s response to a new poll from the New York Times today showing that 64 percent of Democrats say that they would prefer a different candidate in 2024?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: And I would also say from that very same poll, there were 92 percent of Democrats who support this President as well. Look, you know, not to be — not to get into, you know, politics from here or get into any political analysis: This is not something — you know, there’s going to be many polls. They’re going to go up or they’re going to go down. This is not the thing that we are solely focused on.

We are focused on things like today’s signing — this bipartisan gun reform legislation, which will again save lives.

Do we have more work to do? Absolutely. We’re going to continue to — I was talking about inflation and how important — that is a priority for this President — and how we have seen gas

prices go down by close to 30 cents a gallon in the past 25-plus days. That is something that the President is going to continue to work on because we still need to give Americans relief.

We saw — we have seen an economy that has bounced back from when he walked in to this administration over a year ago after dealing — or still dealing, really — in reality — with a once-in-a-generation pandemic and how he — we've been able to bring back jobs that we lost pre-pandemic, and also just continue to do that work.

And how we've seen unemployment at 3.6 percent. The jobs number that we saw last week at 375,000 jobs created in the last month.

All of these things are the — is what the President is going to continue to focus on.

How do we deliver?

Somebody was asking Jake about USICA, also BIA and all the work that we're putting behind that, because that is a top priority for this administration, because we need to continue to compete with countries like China.

So there is so much work to be done that we are — the President is going to focus on and deliver as well.

Q Karine, the event today included an interruption —

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Yeah.

Q — by the father of a high school student who was killed in Parkland. The President first told him to sit down and listen, and then encouraged him to continue speaking. I'm just wondering what your reaction is and what his feeling was about that incident today?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Well, look, you know, our hearts go out to Man- — Manuel Oliver, who has suffered a deep, deep loss. The President met with him earlier today before the event. And as you know, the President understands what loss feels like.

And, you know, the President agrees with him. He agrees that we need to do more.

That's why, in his speech, he called on Congress to pass legislation that would ban assault weapons, as I just mentioned, and high-capacity magazines; strengthen background checks; and enact safe storage laws. This is something that is important — that has been important throughout the President's career as Vice President, as senator.

The President has had the opportunity, as I just mentioned, to speak with Mr. Oliver in the past, and he knows and understands that he is frustrated and that he's hurting, and rightfully so. His life was up — upended when gun violence took his son. And so we'll continue to engage with Mr. Oliver, as — as Ambassador Rice has. When Cedric Richmond was here, he had met — they had met with him as well. And so, we're just going to continue to do the work and to have — have engagement with Mr. Oliver.

Q And just to be clear: You said they met today before Mr. Oliver interrupted him. Can you tell us what they spoke about this morning?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: I was not part of that meeting so I can't speak to what they spoke — spoke on. But as I said, the President understands what loss feels like.

You know, our hearts go out to Mr. Oliver, and I would never want to imagine what that feels like or want to go through what he's going through — that grieving process.

And, again, we agree with him; we need to do more. The President stated that in his speech today. He has mentioned that almost every time that he has spoken about gun reform and what needs to be done, what else needs to be done to really make a change.

This is a — you know, this is a public health emergency that we're dealing with when we talk about gun violence. So we're going to continue to do the work.

Thanks for the question.

Gosh, I'm going to go here. I'll come around.

Q Thank you, Karine. I just wanted to follow up on Kaitlan's question earlier. You'd mentioned some of the accomplishments of the administration, but that same poll that came out said that 63 percent of Democrats believe the country is headed in the wrong direction. How — how do you explain that?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Well, we understand what the American people are feeling. We understand that. We understand that inflation is hurting families when they are around the kitchen table, when they're trying to figure out, you know, how they're going to deal with gas prices at the pump, how they're going to deal with food prices as well. So, we understand that families are hurting right now.

That is why the President has been laser-focused on — on making sure that we truly deal with inflation.

And so, you know, we've seen the gas prices go down. We believe that that is going to continue — that's going to be a trend that we will continue to see. The President has been working on this for months.

And we have to understand how we also got here. We got here with the — with the increase of gas prices and food prices because of Mr. Putin's war in Ukraine. And what we — and how — in particular with food and gas, and how his unprecedented brutal war on Ukraine has cost — has caused prices to go up.

And so, look, the President's going to be focused. We have a strong economy. We are going to — you know, as we're talking about inflation, our plan right now is to do that transition from that — the growth that we've seen in the economy to a more stable and steady growth.

And we've seen that in the numbers last week, with the jobs numbers. And we're going to continue to focus on that, give the Federal Reserve its opportunity, its space to deal with inflation. They have the best monetary policy to do that.

But, again, this is what the President is going to be focused on. We're not going to pay attention to polls. That's not what we're going to do here. What we're going to focus on is delivering for the American people.

Q And lastly, is the President monitoring the wildfires in Yosemite? Is there any commitment from the administration on that?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So I would have to get back to the team and lay out exactly what we're doing. We are in close contact, for sure, with local government, with governors in the state. This is something that we do monitor and have — have in the past worked hand-in-hand with local officials on that — on the specifics.

Q Thanks, Karine.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Oh, is it — oh, my gosh. Is it time? Okay, let me take one more question. One more question.

Go ahead.

Q Thanks, Karine. Does the White House think abortion rights advocates are out of touch with the party, given the quote that Kate Bedingfield gave to the Washington Post this weekend?

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: So I — let me just say — let me just say this: What happened almost two weeks ago now was an unprecedented attack — right? — on women’s right. It was an unprecedented attack on our freedoms. And the President has worked for not just — as I mentioned, not just since the leaked documents, but since we — since we have seen the S.B. 8 in Texas, to make sure that this administration, his administration, is doing everything that they can to deliver for — on this issue of making sure that we protect women’s rights.

And that’s what Kate was saying. She was trying to make sure that we laid out and spoke — continue to speak about what the President — the bold step that the President took.

So we were responding to criticism in that particular article. That’s what we were responding to. And we were responding to some activists and what they were saying in that article. And so, we were trying to be very specific in that as well.

But to say that the President has not been passionate, to say that this President has not been focused is just not true.

And even when Jen Klein was here after the President signed the executive order, she talked about NARAL. She talked about Planned Parenthood and how they welcome the steps that we took and what we are delivering on.

Now, is there going to be more work and more work to do? Absolutely.

And lastly, I will say — and then we have to go because you all have to gather — is that the President has always been honest about what needs to be done and what he believes needs to be done. Yes, we’re going to continue to do the work in the administration. But really, Americans have to take it to the ballot. They have to make sure their voices are heard.

And he also said, “Keep protesting, protesting peacefully,” but also make sure that you take action and ask Congress to take action.

And so that’s what we were speaking to. And that’s what the comments were all about. And we’re going to continue to work on — on behalf of the American public.

Thank you, everybody.

4:39 P.M. EDT