

OCTOBER 25, 2023

Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia in Joint Press Conference

Rose Garden

1:52 P.M. EDT

PRESIDENT BIDEN: The sun is over there. (The President removes his sunglasses.) I don't need these. (Laughter.)

Hello, folks.

Mr. Prime Minister, we've been in close touch since the moment you came into office — please, sit down; I'm sorry — since you came into office, and we've met all around the world.

And now it's wonderful to have you by my side here at the White House and — as we advance our alliance even more — more than it's already been advanced. It's strong now; it's getting stronger.

Before I get to the progress Australia and the United States have made today, I want to say just a very few words about the situation in the Middle East.

The anger, the hurt, the — the sense of outrage that the Israeli people are feeling after the brutally inflicted devastation by Hamas is completely understandable.

Israel has the right and, I would add, responsibility to respond to the slaughter of their people. And we will ensure Israel has what it needs to defend itself against these terrorists. That's a guarantee.

We also have to remember that Hamas does not represent — let me say it

again — Hamas does not represent the vast majority of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip or anywhere else.

Hamas is hiding behind Palestinian civilians, and it's despicable and, not surprisingly, cowardly as well.

This also puts an added burden on Israel while they go after Hamas.

But that does not lessen the need for — to operate and align with the laws of war for Israeli — it has to do everything in its power — Israel has to do everything in its power, as difficult as it is, to protect innocent civilians. And it's difficult.

I want to thank the Israeli — the Israelis and the Palestinian — excuse me, and President Sisi of Egypt for working with the United States to make sure that food, water, and medical supplies are getting through to innocent people in Gaza.

The flow needs to increase, and we're working very hard with our partners to make that happen.

We're also working around the clock, together with our partners in the — in the region, to secure the release of hostages and — including American citizens behind — left behind and held by Hamas and the safe passage of foreign nationals out of Gaza — not just Americans but Australians and a whole range of people who are trapped in Gaza.

I also want take a moment to look ahead toward the future that we seek.

Israelis and Palestinians equally deserve to live side by side in safety, dignity, and peace. And there's no going back to the status quo as it stood on October the 6th. That means ensuring Hamas can no longer terrorize Israel and use Palestinian civilians as human shields.

It also means that when this crisis is over, there has to be a vision of what comes next. And in our view, it has to be a two-state solution.

It means a concentrated effort from all the parties — Israelis, Palestinians,

regional partners, global leaders — to put us on a path toward peace.

In the past few weeks, I've spoken with leaders throughout the region — including King Abdullah of Jordan, President Sisi of Egypt, President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, and just yesterday with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia — about making sure there's real hope in the region for a better future; about the need — and I mean this sincerely — about the need to work toward a greater integration for Israel while insisting that the aspirations of the Palestinian people will be part — will be part of that future as well.

I'm convinced one of the reasons Hamas attacked when they did — and I have no proof of this; just my instinct tells me — is because of the progress we were making towards regional integration for Israel and regional integration overall. And we can't leave that work behind.

And one more word on this. I continue to be alarmed about extremist settlers attacking Palestinians in the West Bank that — pouring gasoline on fire is what it's like.

They — this was the deal. The deal was made, and they're attacking Palestinians in places that they're entitled to be, and it has to stop. They have to be held accountable. And it has to stop now.

Prime Minister — Mr. Prime Minister, I want to thank you for your partnership and your friendship, quite frankly, during this difficult hour.

Over the past few weeks and for many months before, we've seen each other and we've seen our alliance grow more critical than ever. And we need to make — continue to make this important progress. In our discussions today, we've done just that.

First, we're pioneering new advancements in innovation that is deepening our cooperation in fields like biotechnology, advanced batteries, quantum computing, cybersecurity, and a lot more.

We're also signing a new Technology Safeguards Agreement to create more opportunities for American space companies to launch vehicles from Australia.

And we've launched a new artificial intelligence initiative between our national laboratories to drive revolutionary and responsible research on humanity's biggest challenges: fighting hunger, curbing pandemics, predicting natural disasters, and ending cancer as we know it — as a matter of a fact, both of our wives are over at the cancer institute right now — and — and so much more.

Second, we're accelerating action on climate change. I thought we had a very good meeting this morning and — with Secretary Kerry and your team, and we're all together on that.

In May, we established the Climate, Critical Min- — Min — Climate, Critical Minerals, and Clean Energy Compact to elevate our climate cooperation alongside our defense and economic cooperation, and we're already beginning to see the impacts. We've created a Critical Minerals Taskforce to build secure critical minerals supply chains.

We're also investing in sustainable infrastructure in the Pacific Islands, including \$65 million for a subsea communication cable to boost connectivity in the region.

And we're modernizing funding for small- and medium-sized businesses across the Indo-Pacific to help — to help the transition to clean energy.

And finally, our alliance — the alliance between Australia and the United States is an anchor — and I believe this with every fiber of my being — an anchor to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and, quite frankly, around the world.

We see this through our work of the Quad partners — India and Japan — to ensure the Indo-Pacific remains free, open, prosperous, and secure.

I also see it through AUKUS, where, together with the United Kingdom, we're making a generational investments in our shared security.

Last week, I sent Congress a budget request with commitments to boost our

sub- — our submarine production and maintenance capacity here in the United States.

And I want to thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for the historic investments Australia has made to strengthen the submarine industry base as well.

Democrats and Republicans alike understand the strategic value AUKUS brings to our nations, and I urge Congress — I urge Congress to pass our AUKUS legislation this year.

We also see the strength of our alliance in our unwavering support for Ukraine — both countries — as it defends its sovereignty against Putin's brutality and aggression.

Australia is a critical partner together with the United States and 50 other nations — 50 other nations we've been able to put together — all doing our part to support Ukraine.

And I want to thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for the new package of military aid you recently announced, and I — it's for Ukraine.

Look, Australia and the United States also share, in my view, the commitment to upholding the international rules of the road, including freedom of navigation.

Just this past week, the PRC vessels acted dangerously and unlawfully as our Philippine friends conducted a routine resupply mission within their own — their own exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

I want to be clear — I want to be very clear: The United States' defense commitment to the Philippines is ironclad. The United States' defense agreement to the Philippines is ironclad.

Any attack on the Filipino aircraft, vessels, or armed forces will invoke a mutual defense — our Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines.

And, Mr. Prime Minister, today we renewed our commitment to defend the values that are at the heart of this alliance, and we continue to stand as one to

forge a better future for both of us and all the region.

So, I want to thank you, again, for being here. Thank you for your partnership and your leadership in this critical moment.

And I'd like to now turn it over to you.

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: Well, thank you very much, Mr. President.

Australia and the United States have stood together for more than a century. And it is indeed a great honor for me to stand alongside my friend, President Biden, here today.

At the heart of our alliance, the enduring values that our people hold in common are faith in freedom and democracy, a belief in opportunity, a determination to build a more prosperous and more peaceful world.

Those values are timeless, and they have never mattered more than right now.

That's why the relationship between Australia and the United States has never been more important. And it, of course — it has never been stronger than it is right now.

We work together to promote peace and security across the Indo-Pacific, to uphold the stability which has generated unprecedented economic opportunity for the nations and the people of our region.

For Australia, this is about investing in our capability and investing in our relationships.

Today, President Biden and I discussed the progress being made on Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarines, which we announced with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in March in San Diego.

We are conscious that this is only the second time in history that the United States has shared this technology. And this fact speaks to the deep trust of

our alliance and the significance of the challenge that we face together.

Australia appreciates the administration's efforts to operationalize AUKUS and work with Congress to pass the legislation needed to realize our AUKUS ambitions. And I certainly appreciate, once again, Mr. President, your call for this legislation to be passed this year.

AUKUS will drive innovation and cooperation to provide the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom with improved capability to help secure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Our cooperation is already unlocking transformative opportunities for jobs and skills and research, from Virginia to South Australia to Western Australia.

Australia and the U.S. have a strong and growing partnership in new technology, from medical research to AI. And I join President Biden in welcoming Microsoft's \$5 billion additional investment in Australia, which we announced this week here in Washington.

The President and I agree that innovation is vital to addressing the environmental challenge of climate change and seizing the economic opportunities of clean energy. The Climate, Critical Minerals and Clean Energy Transformation Compact that we signed in May in Hiroshima is very much central to this.

Climate change and clean energy becomes a third pillar of our alliance, alongside our security cooperation through ANZUS and our strong economic ties with the free trade agreement between our nations at its center.

The compact lays the foundation for our two countries to advance climate and clean energy action this decade, both at home and globally. Today, we agreed new measures under the compact to support our energy transition, including the establishment of an Australian and U.S. Clean Energy Industry Council, comprised of business and public finance leaders to advise government on clean energy industry development and cooperation.

We're working closely with the United States to build end-to-end

sustainable, reliable, and transparent supply chains for critical minerals. Of course, Australia has abundant supplies of these critical minerals that will drive our economies throughout this century: lithium, cobalt, copper, vanadium, and rare earths.

We want to connect that with American markets, investors, and technology in a way that creates new jobs and opportunities for industry and workers in both of our nations. Cheaper, cleaner energy will reduce costs for households, but it will also power a new generation of manufacturing.

Our alliance is also delivering for the Indo-Pacific region bilaterally and increasingly with our partners in the Quad.

Australia and America are supporting the connectivity of the region, and today we announced a new funding for subsea cables in the Pacific; further support for infrastructure development, including efforts to increase the Pacific's access to financing; and that we'll work together through a new Pacific banking forum to ensure that our friends in the Pacific maintain access to the global financial system.

Today, we also discussed our joint position opposing Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine. Australia stands with Ukraine.

And President Biden welcomed the package for further assistance that I announced yesterday. This will provide Ukraine with additional military assistance, utilizing the innovative technology that's produced by Australia's defense industry partners.

Finally, of course, last night and again today, we spoke about the situation in Israel and Gaza. Australia unequivocally condemns the terrorism of Hamas. We grieve for the loss of every innocent life, whether that be Israeli or Palestinian.

In times of crisis, respect for international humanitarian law is paramount. It is a recognition of our common humanity. And I commend the President for his leadership that he has shown and the example that he has set.

Today, I announced that Australia will provide an additional \$15 million in

humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza — this adds to the \$10 million Australia has already committed — and will help deliver lifesaving assistance such as emergency water and medical services.

The friendship between Australia and the United States was forged in hard times. We've served and sacrificed together in the cause of peace. We've helped each other through natural disasters.

Australians and Americans share a rich history, but we always have our eye on the future. We're united by a determination to overcome the challenges that we face, and we share an ambition to seize those opportunities which lay ahead of us.

Ours is indeed an alliance in which we celebrate what we've achieved up to now but we focus on the future — a future of great opportunities, one that's stronger because of this alliance.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: All right. We're going to take a few questions now.

Mr. Garrison, USA Today.

Q Thank you, Mr. President and Prime Minister Albanese. Welcome to Washington.

Mr. President, I want to ask about the conflict — the war in the Middle East. Twenty-four U.S. troops have been injured during 10 drone or rocket attacks on bases in Iraq and 3 in Syria over the past week. You've told Iran to, quote, "be careful" as your administration tries to prevent the Israeli-Hamas war from expanding into a larger Middle East conflict. But should Americans be worried that the war already is escalating?

And after you answer that question, I'd like one more follow-up, please.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: About one or two more, huh?

Q Two or three. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Joey, look, we have had troops in the region since 9/11

to go after ISIS and prevent its reasser- — reemergence in — in both — anyway, in the region — having nothing to do with Israel at all.

My warning to the Ayatollah was that if they continue to move against those troops, we will respond, and he should be prepared. It has nothing to do with Israel.

Q Well, let me — let me ask my follow-up here. I want to discuss — oh, here we go — yeah, your conversations with Prime Minister Netanyahu, who, obviously, you've known for decades, and you had a very emotional trip there last week to Israel. Have you sought assurances from him that he will hold off on a ground invasion into Gaza until the safe relief — release of the hostages can be assured? And, of course, those include 10 unaccounted-for Americans.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: No. What I have indicated to him is that if that's possible to get these folks out safely, that's what he should do. It's their decision, but I did not demand it. I pointed out to him: If it's real, it should be done.

Thank you.

Q But aren't these hostages in jeopardy if there is a ground invasion?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: You want to make a speech? (Laughter.) Now, look —

Q Yes?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: — obviously, they're in jeopardy. The question is whether or not there's any way of getting them out. If we can get them out, we should get them out.

Q Prime Minister — Prime Minister Albanese — and welcome, again, to Washington — President Biden canceled his May trip to Australia because of debt ceiling talks in Congress to avoid a first-ever default here in the U.S.

More recently, congressional action has stalled as House Republicans try to pick a Speaker. However, it does appear, since we've been out here, that the

House has elected a Congressman, Mike Johnson from Louisiana, to that role.

But are you worried that grid- — the gridlock in Washington will hold up the transfer of nuclear-powered subs to Australia as part of the AUKUS agreement? And are you concerned, more broadly, that the dysfunction makes the U.S. a less reliable partner?

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: I regard the United States as a very reliable partner. And I regard the relationship that I have with the President as second to none of the relationships that I have around the world or indeed domestically, for that matter. (Laughter.)

It's a — it's a relationship of trust, and I think this visit symbolizes that. This is the ninth visit that I've had with President Biden. I got to meet President Biden when he was Vice President Biden just — just next door here some years ago.

And I'm very confident in the discussions that I've had with Democrats and Republicans that there is very broad support for the AUKUS arrangements, and that there will be support for the legislation going forward. And I think that would be a very good thing. It is in the interest of Australia, but it's also in the interest of the United States.

And everyone that I have spoken to — similarly in the United Kingdom — across the political spectrum are all supportive of the AUKUS arrangements.

Q And regarding the Israel-Hamas war, I wanted to ask —

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: Well, we — we —

Q Yeah?

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: — we in Australia have managed to get it so we get once question each. So —

Q Hey, I figured I'd try and ask a sec- —

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: Yeah, good try.

Q Anyway, all right.

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: But, Channel 10 Australia.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Go get 'em, Joe Joe. (Laughter.)

Q President Biden, just staying with AUKUS. AUKUS is in many ways your creation. It's Australia's largest-ever defense deal, and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has gone all in. Can you give a personal guarantee that you can get all the necessary legislation through Congress and lock in this deal, essentially future-proofing it, before the end of his presidential term?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Do you know anyone in elective office who can give a personal guarantee that it happens? I won't — I — I'm not going to —

Q Well, we'd like you to try.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: No, I'm going to try, and I believe it will get done.

Look, last week we requested \$3.4 billion in — in supplemental funds to boost submarine production and maintenance to meet U.S. needs and also support AUKUS. Australia is making a significant — a significant investment in the United States and its ability to produce submarines as part of this deal. And more importantly, it's important that Congress move quickly.

And the fact is that I'm confident that we can get this done, because — you remember when we put it — the deal together? The response — the Democrats and Republicans in the United States — the response around the free world was, "This is a very, very good thing. A very good thing."

So, the question is not if but when and I — and Joe Joe told us that they — we got a new Speaker or will likely have a new Speaker. I hope that's true because we have to get moving. We have to get moving. And so, I'm — I am confident that we're going to be able to get the money for AUKUS because it's overwhelmingly in our interest.

When I was asked — when we put together the deal, I was asked by Xi Jinping were we just trying to surround China. I said, “No, we’re not surrounding China.” We’re just making sure that the sea lanes remain open, he doesn’t unilaterally be able to change the rules of the road in terms of what constitutes international airspace and water space, et cetera. And so, that’s what this is all about. It’s about making sure we have a close —

And it’s in addition to the fact that we put together the Quad, which they didn’t like. The Quad is a very important piece as well. It’s about maintaining stability — stability in the Taiwan Strait, the Indian Ocean, the whole — that whole area. And I think it’s going to increase the prospects for long-term peace rather than do anything else.

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: Your turn.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Oh, I get to ask. I’m going to get to — okay.

PBS. Ms. — Ms. Lopez.

Q Mr. President, thank you. If I may, I have a breaking news question and then an Israel one.

First, after 22 days, House Republicans just elected Mike Johnson of Louisiana as the Speaker of the House. Johnson advocated conspiracy theories about voting machines and a rigged election in 2020. He encouraged his colleagues to join a lawsuit to invalidate the results of four states. So, if you win reelection in 2024, are you worried that a Speaker Johnson would again attempt to overturn the election?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: No.

Q Why not?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Because he can’t have — look, just like I was not worried that the last guy would be able to overturn the election. They have about 60 lawsuits, and they all went to the Supreme Court, and, every time,

they lost. I understand the Constitution.

Q And if I may, very quickly — in the 18 days since Hama- — Hamas killed 1,400 Israelis, the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry says Israeli forces have killed over 6,000 Palestinians, including 2,700 chil- — children. You’ve previously asked Netanyahu to minimize civilian casualties. Do these numbers say to you that he is ignoring that message?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: What they say to me is I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed. I’m sure innocents have been killed, and it’s the price of waging a war.

I think we should be incredibly careful. I think — well, not “we” — the Israelis should be incredibly careful to be sure that they’re focusing on going after the folks that are the pr- — propagating this war against Israel. And it’s against their interest when that doesn’t happen.

But I have no confidence in the number that the Palestinians are using.

Q Thank you, Mr. President.

Prime Minister Albanese, you’re traveling to China early next month. President Biden has said China should expect, quote, “extreme competition from the United States.” Do you support extreme competition with China? And what does that look like for you?

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: Well, we have strategic competition in our region. That’s a fact that we are living with.

The relationship with — with China is one where the principle that I bring to it is to cooperate where we can, disagree where we must, but engage in our national interest.

It is in Australia’s interest, as well as China — but, I believe, in the global interest — for us to have a relationship where there is dialogue. And hence, I welcome the fact that I have been invited to China.

I’ll be traveling at the same time as we will commemorate 50 years since the

first visit by an Australian prime minister, Gough Whitlam, to China in a — a short period of time now. And I think that is a positive thing.

It is good that various senior representatives in the U.S. administration have had meetings with their Chinese counterparts in recent times, because dialogue is always a good thing. Through dialogue comes understanding and comes a diffusion of tension.

We want a peaceful and secure region, but we want one as well that's based upon the rule of law and where national sovereignty, including issues such as the South China Sea and the — the right of passage in that important waterway there — the East China Sea, the Taiwan Strait — is respected. And that is Australia's position.

We cooperate very much with the — with the United States on those matters and on others.

But I look forward to a constructive dialogue when I visit Shanghai and Beijing.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: The context of extreme competition was not conflict. Read the whole paragraph. I talked about — we're going to have — we're going to compete with China on every way according to the international rules — economically, politically, and other ways — but not — I'm not looking for conflict.

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: Geoff.

Q Yeah, Geoff Chambers from The Australian.

President Biden, as mentioned, Prime Minister Albanese flies to Beijing next Saturday to meet the Chinese President and Premier. Your administration has raised deep concerns over a very long period of time about the Chinese communist government's aggressive coercion and intimidation tactics; maritime claims in the South China Sea, as we've seen with the situation with the Philippines; state-sponsored cyberattacks.

Last week, we heard from the spy chiefs talking about theft of intellectual property on an industrial scale and obviously, human rights abuses. What do

you make of China's reengagement with Australia? Can Australia trust Beijing? And can Australia do business with China?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: "Trust but verify" is the phrase. And, look, China is having their own internal and external difficulties right now. China's economic growth is stagnant compared to what it was. China has engaged in activities that Russia and many other activities that — that others have engaged in in terms of intimidation and dealing with other countries.

But the fact is that I have met with Xi Jinping more than any other world leader has. I've had over 68 hours of private meetings, just he and I with simultaneous interpreters — starting back when I was vice president, because it wasn't appropriate for a president of the United States to be meeting with the vice president. So, I traveled 17,000 miles with him.

And I've subsequently — in addition to that 68 hours, I've also had another — they tell me — they keep meticulous contact as I — another, I think, 12, 15 hours of discussions, just he and I.

And I think that he is realizing that there are — for example, his Belt and Road Initiative — well, we're going to compete on that. And we're going to — we're doing it a different way. The Belt and Road Initiative has been a debt and a noose for most of the people that signed on.

We are working with our G7 partners to provide infrastructure for the very nations that he's trying to deal with.

We want to — for example, the G — at the G20, we were able to act on a proposal I had to bring — to build a railroad all the way from Riyadh, all the way through the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Israel, up through Greece, and then across the — not the railroad, but pipeline across the — the Mediterranean up into Europe. To y- —

Q So you're the more reliable partner?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Pardon me?

Q You're the reliable partner in terms of when you say you're going to

deliver something, the U.S. and its partners deliver things.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Well, I — I hope the United — not just me — I hope the United States is a reliable partner when we act. But it wasn't just the United States that agreed on that.

Because, look, even to this day, when my discussions with — with — with the — with the Saudis, the Crown Prince, was he wants to see a reconciliation take place. It's overwhelmingly in his interest. It's in Saudis' interest. It's — the idea that you'd have the nations of the Middle East cooperating economically and politically changes the dynamics significantly.

And so, I — I just think that it is — it's something that it's in everyone's interest — including, long-term, in China's interest.

Q I just had one for the Prime Minister as well. Have you had a chance to speak to Benjamin Netanyahu? I know there's been efforts made. Obviously, the President was — was there in Israel last week. Are you still endeavoring to speak to the Israeli Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE: I — I am. I have spoken with the Israeli ambassador on a number of occasions. We continue to — we understand that, obviously, Mr. Netanyahu has — has pressures on, which at the — the top of the list is not — is — is not the discussion with the Australian Prime Minister.

We understand the pressures which are there, but we have a request for a call in.

Thank you.

(Cross-talk by reporters.)

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Louder! Holler louder!

(Cross-talk by reporters.)

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you, everybody. The press conference has now

concluded. Thank you, everyone.

2:23 P.M. EDT