

BRIEFING ROOM

Remarks by President Biden Before the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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THE PRESIDENT: Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, my fellow delegates, to all those who dedicate themselves to this noble mission of this institution: It's my honor to speak to you for the first time as President of the United States.

We meet this year in a moment of — intermingled with great pain and extraordinary possibility. We've lost so much to this devastating — this devastating pandemic that continues to claim lives around the world and impact so much on our existence.

We're mourning more than 4.5 million people — people of every nation from every background. Each death is an individual heartbreak. But our shared grief is a poignant reminder that our collective future will hinge on our ability to recognize our common humanity and to act together.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the clear and urgent choice that we face here at the dawning of what must be a decisive decade for our world — a decade that will quite literally determine our futures.

As a global community, we're challenged by urgent and looming crises wherein lie enormous opportunities if — if — we can summon the will and resolve to seize these opportunities.

Will we work together to save lives, defeat COVID-19 everywhere, and take the necessary steps to prepare ourselves for the next pandemic? For there will be another one. Or will we fail to harness the tools at our disposal as the more virulent and dangerous variants take hold?

Will we meet the threat of challenging climate — the challenging climate we're all feeling already ravaging every part of our world with extreme weather? Or will we suffer the merciless march of ever-worsening droughts and floods, more intense fires and hurricanes, longer heatwaves and rising seas?

Will we affirm and uphold the human dignity and human rights under which nations in common cause, more than seven decades ago, formed this institution?

Will we apply and strengthen the core tenets of inter- — of the international system, including the U.N. Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as we seek to shape the emergence of new technologies and deter new threats? Or will we allow these universal — those universal principles to be trampled and twisted in the pursuit of naked political power?

In my view, how we answer these questions in this moment — whether we choose to fight for our shared future or not — will reverberate for generations yet to come.

Simply put: We stand, in my view, at an inflection point in history. And I'm here today to share with you how the United States intends to work with partners and allies to answer these questions and the commitment of my new administration to help lead the world toward a more peaceful, prosperous future for all people.

Instead of continuing to fight the wars of the past, we are fixing our eyes on devoting our resources to the challenges that hold the keys to our collective future: ending this pandemic; addressing the climate crisis; managing the shifts in global power dynamics; shaping the rules of the world on vital issues like trade, cyber, and emerging technologies; and facing the threat of terrorism as it stands today.

We've ended 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan. And as we close this period of relentless war, we're opening a new era of relentless diplomacy; of using the power of our development aid to invest in new ways of lifting people up around the world; of renewing and defending democracy; of proving that no matter how challenging or how complex the problems we're going to face, government by and for the people is still the best way to deliver for all of our people.

And as the United States turns our focus to the priorities and the regions of the world, like the Indo-Pacific, that are most consequential today and tomorrow, we'll do so with our allies and partners, through cooperation at multilateral institutions like the United Nations, to amplify our collective strength and speed, our progress toward dealing with these global challenges.

There's a fundamental truth of the 21st century within each of our own countries and as a global community that our own success is bound up with others succeeding as well.

To deliver for our own people, we must also engage deeply with the rest of the world.

To ensure that our own future, we must work together with other partners — our partners — toward a shared future.

Our security, our prosperity, and our very freedoms are interconnected, in my view, as never before. And so, I believe we must work together as never before.

Over the last eight months, I have prioritized rebuilding our alliances, revitalizing our partnerships, and recognizing they're essential and central to America's enduring security and prosperity.

We have reaffirmed our sacred NATO Alliance to Article 5 commitment. We're working with our Allies toward a new strategic concept that will help our Alliance better take on evolving threats of today and tomorrow.

We renewed our engagement with the European Union, a fundamental partner in tackling the full range of significant issues facing our world today.

We elevated the Quad partnership among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States to take on challenges ranging from health security to climate to emerging technologies.

We're engaging with regional institutions — from ASEAN to the African Union to the Organization of American States — to focus on people's urgent needs for better health and better economic outcomes.

We're back at the table in international forums, especially the United Nations, to focus attention and to spur global action on shared challenges.

We are reengaged at the World Health Organization and working in close partnership with COVAX to deliver lifesaving vaccines around the world.

We rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement, and we're running to retake a seat on the Human Rights Council next year at the U.N.

And as the United States seeks to rally the world to action, we will lead not just with the example of our power but, God willing, with the power of our example.

Make no mistake: The United States will continue to defend ourselves, our Allies, and our interests against attack, including terrorist threats, as we prepare to use force if any is necessary, but — to defend our vital U.S. national interests, including against ongoing and imminent threats.

But the mission must be clear and achievable, undertaken with the informed consent of the American people and, whenever possible, in partnership with our Allies.

U.S. military power must be our tool of last resort, not our first, and it should not be used as an answer to every problem we see around the world.

Indeed, today, many of our greatest concerns cannot be solved or even addressed through the force of arms. Bombs and bullets cannot defend against COVID-19 or its future variants.

To fight this pandemic, we need a collective act of science and political will. We need to act now to get shots in arms as fast as possible and to expand access to oxygen, tests, treatments to save lives around the world.

And for the future, we need to create a new mechanism to finance global health security that builds on our existing development assistance, and Global Health Thr- — and a Global Health Threat Council- — Council that is armed with the tools we need to monitor and identify emerging pandemics so that we can take immediate action.

Already, the United States has put more than \$15 billion toward global COVID respon- — the global COVID response. We've shipped more than 160 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to other countries. This includes 130 million doses from our own supply and the first tranches of the half a billion doses of Pfizer vaccine we purchased to donate through COVAX.

Planes carrying vaccines from the United States have already landed in 100 countries, bringing people all over the world a little “dose of hope,” as one American nurse termed it to me. A “dose of hope,” direct from the American people — and, importantly, no strings attached.

And tomorrow, at the U.S.-hosted Global 19 — COVID-19 Summit, I'll be announcing additional commitments as we seek to advance the fight against COVID-19 and hold ourselves accountable around specific targets on three key challenges: saving lives now, vaccinating the world, and building back better.

This year has also brought widespread death and devastation from the borderless climate crisis. The extreme weather events that we have seen in every part of the world — and you all know it and feel it — represent what the Secretary-General has rightly called “code red for

humanity.” And the scientists and experts are telling us that we’re fast approaching a “point of no return,” in the literal sense.

To keep within our reach the vital goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, every nation needs to bring their highest-possible ambitions to the table when we meet in Glasgow for COP26 and then to have to keep raising our collective ambition over time.

In April, I announced the United States’ ambitious new goal under the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the United States by 50 to 52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, as we work toward achieving a clean-energy economy with net-zero emissions by 2050.

And my administration is working closely with our Congress to make the critical investments in green infrastructure and electric vehicles that will help us lock in progress at home toward our climate goals.

And the best part is: Making these ambitious investments isn’t just good climate policy, it’s a chance for each of our countries to invest in ourselves and our own future. It’s an enormous opportunity to create good-paying jobs for workers in each of our countries and to spur long-term economic growth that will improve the quality of life for all of our people.

We also have to support the countries and people that will be hit hardest and that have the fewest resources to help them adapt.

In April, I announced the United States will double our public international financing to help developing nations tackle the climate crisis. And today, I’m proud to announce that we’ll work with the Congress to double that number again, including for adaptation efforts.

This will make the United States a leader in public climate finance. And with our added support, together with increased private capital and other — from other donors, we’ll be able to meet the goal of mobilizing \$100 billion to support climate action in developing nations.

As we deal with these crises, we’re also encountering a new era — an era of new technologies and possibilities that have the potential to release and reshape every aspect of human existence. And it’s up to all of us to determine whether these technologies are a force to empower people or to deepen repression.

As new technologies continue to evolve, we’ll work together with our democratic partners to ensure that new advances in areas from biotechnology, to quantum computing, 5G, artificial intelligence, and more are used to lift people up, to solve problems, and advance human freedom — not to suppress dissent or target minority communities.

And the United States intends to make a profound investment in research and innovation, working with countries at all stages of economic development to develop new tools and technologies to help us tackle the challenges of this second quarter of the 21st century and beyond.

We're hardening our critical infrastructure against cyberattacks, disrupting ransomware networks, and working to establish clear rules of the road for all nations as it relates to cyberspace.

We reserve the right to respond decisively to cyberattacks that threaten our people, our allies, or our interests.

We will pursue new rules of global trade and economic growth that strive to level the playing field so that it's not artificially tipped in favor of any one country at the expense of others and every nation has a right and the opportunity to compete fairly.

We will strive to ensure that basic labor rights, environmental safeguards, and intellectual property are protected and that the benefits of globalization are shared broadly throughout all our societies.

We'll continue to uphold the longstanding rules and norms that have formed the guardrails of international engagement for decades that have been essential to the development of nations around the world — bedrock commitments like freedom of navigation, adherence to international laws and treaties, support for arms control measures that reduce the res- — the risk and enhance transparency.

Our approach is firmly grounded and fully consistent with the United Nations' mission and the values we've agreed to when we drafted this Charter. These are commitments we all made and that we're all bound to uphold.

And as we strive to deal with these urgent challenges, whether they're longstanding or newly emerging, we must also deal with one another.

All the major powers of the world have a duty, in my view, to carefully manage their relationships so they do not tip

from responsible competition to conflict.

The United States will compete, and will compete vigorously, and lead with our values and our strength.

We'll stand up for our allies and our friends

and oppose attempts by stronger countries to dominate weaker ones, whether through changes to territory by force, economic coercion, technological exploitation, or disinformation.

But we're not seeking — I'll say it again — we are not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs.

The United States is ready to work with any nation that steps up and pursues peaceful resolution to shared challenges,

even if we have intense disagreements in other areas — because we'll all suffer the consequences of our failure if we do not come together to address the urgent threats like COVID-19 and climate change or enduring threats like nuclear proliferation.

The United States remains committed to preventing Iran — to preventing Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon. We are working with the P5+1 to engage Iran diplomatically and seek a return to the JCPOA. We're prepared to return to full compliance if Iran does the same.

Similarly, we seek serious and sustained diplomacy to pursue the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

We seek concrete progress toward an available plan with tangible commitments that would increase stability on the Peninsula and in the region, as well as improve the lives of the people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

We must also remain vigilant to the threat of terrorism — that terrorism poses to all our nations, whether emanating from distant regions of the world or in our own backyards.

We know the bitter sting [sic] of terrorism — the bitter sting of terrorism is — is real, and we've almost all experienced it.

Last month, we lost 13 American heroes and almost 200 innocent Afghan civilians in the heinous terrorist attack at the Kabul airport.

Those who commit acts of terrorism against us will continue to find a determined enemy in the United States.

The world today is not the world of 2001, though, and the United States is not the same country we were when we were attacked on 9/11, 20 years ago.

Today, we're better equipped to detect and prevent terrorist threats, and we are more resilient in our ability to repel them and to respond.

We know how to build effective partnerships to dismantle terrorist networks by targeting their financing and support systems, countering their propaganda, preventing their travel, as well as disrupting imminent attacks.

We'll meet terrorist threats that arise today and in the future with a full range of tools available to us, including working in cooperation with local partners so that we need not be so reliant on large-scale military deployments.

One of the most important ways we can effectively enhance security and reduce violence is by seeking to improve the lives of the people all over the world who see that their governments are not serving their needs.

Corruption fuels inequality, siphons off a nation's resources, spreads across borders, and generates human suffering. It is nothing less than a national security threat in the 21st century.

Around the world, we're increasingly seeing citizens demonstrate their discontent seeing the wealthy and well-connected grow richer and richer, taking payoffs and bribes, operating above the law while the vast majority of the people struggle to find a job or put food on the table or to get their business off the ground or simply send their children to school.

People have taken to the streets in every region to demand that their governments address peoples' basic needs, give everyone a fair shot to succeed, and protect their God-given rights.

And in that chorus of voices across languages and continents, we hear a common cry: a cry for dignity — simple dignity. As leaders, it is our duty to answer that call, not to silence it.

The United States is committing to use — committed to using our resources and our international platform to support these voices, listen to them, partner with them to find ways to respond that advance human dignity around the world.

For example, there is an enormous need for infrastructure in developing countries, but infrastructure that is low-quality or that feeds corruption or exacerbates environmental degradation may only end up contributing to greater challenges for countries over time.

Done the right way, however, with transparent, sustainable investment in projects that respond to the country's needs and engage their local workers to maintain high labor and environmental standards, infrastructure can be a strong foundation that allows societies in low- and middle-income countries to grow and to prosper.

That's the idea behind the Build Back Better World.

And together with the private sector and our G7 partners, we aim to mobilize hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure investment.

We also — we'll also continue to be the world's largest contributor to humanitarian assistance, bringing food, water, shelter, emergency healthcare, and other vital, lifesaving aid to millions of people in need.

When the earthquake strikes, a typhoon rages, or a disaster anywhere in the world, the United States shows up. We'll be ready to help.

And at a time when nearly one in three people globally do not have access to adequate food — adequate food, just last year — the United States is committing to rallying our partners to address immediate malnutrition and to ensure that we can sustainably feed the world for decades to come.

To that end, the United States is making a \$10 billion commitment to end hunger and invest in food systems at home and abroad.

Since 2000, the United States government has provided more than \$140 billion to advance health and strengthen health systems, and we will continue our leadership to drive these vital investments to make peoples' lives better every single day. Just give them a little breathing room.

And as we strive to make lives better, we must work with renewed purpose to end the conflicts that are driving so much pain and hurt around the world.

We must redouble our diplomacy and commit to political negotiations, not violence, as the tool of first resort to manage tensions around the world.

We must seek a future of greater peace and security for all the people of the Middle East.

The commitment of the United States to Israel's security is without question. And a support — our support for an independent, Jewish state is unequivocal.

But I continue to believe that a two-state solution is the best way to ensure Israel — Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian state.

We're a long way from that goal at this moment, but we must never allow ourselves to give up on the possibility of progress.

We cannot give up on solving raging civil conflicts, including in Ethiopia and Yemen, where fighting between war- --warring parties is driving famine, horrori- — horrific violence, human rights violations against civilians, including the unconscionable use of rape as a weapon of war.

We will continue to work with the international community to press for peace and bring an end to this suffering.

As we pursue diplomacy across the board, the United States will champion the democratic values that go to the very heart of who we are as a nation and a people: freedom, equality, opportunity, and a belief in the universal rights of all people.

It's stamped into our DNA as a nation. And critically, it's stamped into the DNA of this institution — the ~~United~~ States [Nations]. We sometimes forget.

I quote the opening words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, quote: "The equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world."

The founding ethos of the United Nations places the rights of individuals at the center of our system, and that clarity and vision must not be ignored or misinterpreted.

The United States will do our part, but we will be more successful and more impactful if all of our nations are working toward the full mission to which we are called.

That's why more than 100 nations united agai- — around a shared statement and the Security Council adopted a resolution outlining how we'll support the people of Afghanistan moving forward, laying out the expectations to which we will hold the Taliban when it comes to respecting universal human rights.

We all must advocate for women — the rights of women and girls to use their full talents to contribute economically, politically, and socially and pursue their dreams free of violence and intimidation — from Central America to the Middle East, to Africa, to Afghanistan — wherever it appears in the world.

We all must call out and condemn the targeting and oppression of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities when it occurs in — whether it occurs in Xinjiang or northern Ethiopia or anywhere in the world.

We all must defend the rights of LGBTQI individuals so they can live and love openly without fear, whether it's Chechnya or Cameroon or anywhere.

As we steer our — steer our nations toward this inflection point and work to meet today's fast-moving, cross-cutting challenges, let me be clear: I am not agnostic about the future we want for the world.

The future will belong to those who embrace human dignity, not trample it.

The future will belong to those who unleash the potential of their people, not those who stifle it.

The future will belong to those who give their people the ability to breathe free, not those who seek to suffocate their people with an iron hand.

Authoritarianism — the authoritarianism of the world may seek to proclaim the end of the age of democracy, but they're wrong.

The truth is: The democratic world is everywhere. It lives in the anti-corruption activists, the human rights defenders, the journalists, the peace protestors on the frontlines of this struggle in Belarus, Burma, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, and everywhere in between.

It lives in the brave women of Sudan who withstood violence and oppression to push a genocidal dictator from power and who keep working every day to defend their democratic progress.

It lives in the proud Moldovans who helped deliver a landslide victory for the forces of democracy, with a mandate to fight graft, to build a more inclusive economy.

It lives in the young people of Zambia who harnessed the power of their vote for the first time, turning out in record numbers to denounce corruption and chart a new path for their country.

And while no democracy is perfect, including the United States — who will continue to struggle to live up to the highest ideals to heal our divisions, and we face down violence and insurrection — democracy remains the best tool we have to unleash our full human potential.

My fellow leaders, this is a moment where we must prove ourselves the equals of those who have come before us, who with vision and values and determined faith in our collective future built our United Nations, broke the cycle of war and destruction, and laid the foundations for more than seven decades of relative peace and growing global prosperity.

Now we must again come together to affirm the inherent humanity that unites us is much greater than any outward divisions or disagreements.

We must choose to do more than we think we can do alone so that we accomplish what we must, together: ending this pandemic and making sure we're better prepared for the next one; staving off climactic climate change and increasing our resilience to the impacts we already are seeing; ensuring a future where technologies are a vital tool to solving human challenges and empowering human potential, not a source of greater strife and repression.

These are the challenges that we — will determine what the world looks like for our children and our grandchildren, and what they'll inherit. We can only meet them by looking to the future.

I stand here today, for the first time in 20 years, with the United States not at war. We've turned the page.

All the unmatched strength, energy, commitment, will, and resources of our nation are now fully and squarely focused on what's ahead of us, not what was behind.

I know this: As we look ahead, we will lead. We will lead on all the greatest challenges of our time — from COVID to climate, peace and security, human dignity and human rights. But we will not go it alone.

We will lead together with our Allies and partners and in cooperation with all those who believe, as we do, that this is within our power to meet these challenges, to build a future that lifts all of our people and preserves this planet.

But none of this is inevitable; it's a choice. And I can tell you where America stands: We will choose to build a better future. We — you and I -- we have the will and capacity to make it better.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot afford to waste any more time. Let's get to work. Let's make our better future now.

We can do this. It's within our power and capacity.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

10:34 A.M. EDT