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Biden to Send Putin Message in Ukraine War Anniversary Speech

By Sebastian Smith for AFP

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An image of Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) is shown as U.S. President Joe Biden makes remarks on gas prices in the South Court Auditorium of the White House Complex in Washington, June 22, 2022. **EPA/Chris Kleponis / POOL/TASS**

President Joe Biden will be "messaging" Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin when he speaks in Warsaw next week, while hailing NATO's unprecedented effort to help Ukrainians save their country as the war reaches the one-year mark.

The White House says Biden will give the speech in Poland — a key U.S. ally and fulcrum of vast efforts to arm Ukraine and receive refugees — on Tuesday.

That's the same day Putin is set to give his own speech in Moscow, three days from the Feb. 24th anniversary of Russian tanks rolling into Ukraine.

A year ago, the world looked on in horror as a huge Russian force headed directly toward

Ukraine's capital Kyiv for what Moscow planned to be a rapid conquest, leading to capitulation and installation of a pro-Russian regime.

Instead, Biden will be commemorating the partnership between NATO countries and what was to many an unexpectedly well-organized Ukrainian military, which has not only repelled Russian forces from the capital but recaptured swaths of territory.

Biden will touch down in Warsaw on Tuesday and meet with Polish President Andrzej Duda. On Wednesday he meets with leaders of the Bucharest Nine, a group of NATO members in eastern Europe — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

In addition, he will speak by phone next week with the leaders of Britain, France and Italy, the White House said. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is due in Washington on March 3.

But Biden's main public event will be the speech delivered Tuesday from Warsaw's Royal Castle, on "how the United States has rallied the world to support the people of Ukraine as they defend their freedom and democracy," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

"President Biden will make it clear that the United States will continue to stand with Ukraine... for as long as it takes," he told reporters on Friday.

"You'll hear messages in the president's speech that will certainly resonate with the American people, certainly will resonate with our allies and partners, without question resonate with the Polish people," Kirby said.

"And I would suspect that you'll hear him messaging Mr. Putin as well, as well as the Russian people."

Kirby said Biden has no plans to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during the trip or travel into Ukraine — which, due to the heavy security around U.S. presidents, he has not done since the war started.

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The White House would not say what specific aid Biden might announce during his trip, but Kirby said Ukraine will be reassured about receiving "continued, tangible support."

The United States has provided far more than any other NATO country to Ukraine, with military, economic, humanitarian and other aid now exceeding $100 billion.

That includes a $47 billion package approved by Congress in December, which Kirby said was in the early stages of being disbursed.

In the first days of the war, the United States led Western efforts to rush anti-tank rockets to Ukraine, helping the outnumbered, outgunned army to wreak havoc against the Russian armored columns.

As the Ukrainians gathered momentum, so did NATO partners' delivery of weaponry.

Precision artillery batteries helped the Ukrainians nullify the Russian advantage in long-distance shelling duels, and helped set the stage for counterattacks to recapture territory.

NATO countries are now sending modern tanks, as well as large numbers of armored fighting vehicles, such as the tank-killing U.S. Bradley, that will be crucial in an expected attempt to push the Russians further back in the spring.

Zelensky is pleading constantly for more weaponry, warning that Russia too is planning an offensive as soon as the brutal eastern European winter ends.

"You can't hardly blame him can you?" Kirby said. "We also understand the clock and we know that time is critical here."

Biden, considered likely to run for a second term in 2024, has so far navigated past potential revolts in Congress over the flood of money spent on Ukraine.

While some of the Republicans' right-wing and a few voices on the Democratic left are speaking up, leaders of both parties are unusually unified on the need to press forward with the strategy.

"Don't look at Twitter, look at people in power," top Republican Senator Mitch McConnell told the Munich Security Conference, where Ukraine was the top issue on Friday.

"Republican leaders are committed to a strong trans-Atlantic alliance. We are committed to helping Ukraine. Not because of vague moral arguments or abstractions like the so-called 'rules-based international order.' But rather, because America's own core national interests are at stake," he said.

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