

Biden to address U.N. assembly in an effort to bolster alliances

In New York, the president seeks to reignite backing for Ukraine amid signs that support for aid is flagging

By Tyler Pager and John Hudson
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NEW YORK — President Biden will outline his vision for tackling global challenges in his annual address to the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday, seeking to use the marquee speech to bolster cooperation from allies and partners amid signs of shifts and strains in the world's alliances.

U.S. officials declined to give many specifics on the president's speech, saying it was still being finalized on Monday evening, but this year's gathering is once again expected to heavily focus on Ukraine. The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity to preview the president's remarks, said Biden will reaffirm his commitment to the U.N. charter, express a commitment to reforming international organizations to meet the current moment and address global challenges including climate change, infrastructure and economic development.

They said Biden would tout the work his administration has done in those areas and outline ways the United States can work with other countries to make even more progress.

Last week, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that a "substantial section" of Biden's speech will focus on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"He will talk about the fundamental fact that the United Nations Charter — the charter that founded the organization that everybody is gathering next week in New York to engage with — speaks to the basic proposition that countries cannot attack their neighbors and steal their territory by force," Sullivan said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will be in attendance here. He travels to Washington later in the week to meet with Biden and members of Congress. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court over Russian atrocities in Ukraine, is not attending the U.N. event.

The high-profile gathering gives Biden one more opportunity to try to catalyze world opinion behind continuing to supply Ukraine with arms and other aid amid signs that support for Kyiv may be flagging in the United States and abroad. At a recent meeting of the Group of 20 economic powers, members struggled to produce a joint statement on Ukraine and other matters. In the United States, Republicans are divided over whether to support continued aid.

A long-awaited Ukrainian military counteroffensive against Russia has made less progress than its allies had hoped, adding to the sense that the war is turning into a long slog without a clear endpoint.

In addition to Ukraine, Sullivan and other U.S. officials say the president will focus on a wide range of global development issues, including those important to less-wealthy nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, a region that is often referred to as the Global South.

“He will lay out for the world the steps that he and his administration have taken to advance a vision of American leadership that is built on the premise of working with others to solve the world’s most pressing problems,” Sullivan said. “We’ve put a lot of points on the board, and the president will talk about how those steps — how all of those steps he’s taken so far ladder up to a larger vision.”

Underlying much of the message is the growing rivalry between the United States and China for influence in the Global South. U.S. officials hope to take advantage of the fact that Chinese leader Xi Jinping will not be traveling to New York for the gathering this week, nor will China’s top diplomat, Wang Yi.

While Biden has the benefit of a high-level U.N. week without Putin or Xi, he is sharing the proverbial stage with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

Raisi, who is holding meetings on the sidelines of the summit this week, harshly criticized the United States during a meeting with journalists on Monday, saying its “meddling” in the Middle East has caused “seven decades of oppression” and “destruction.”

The Biden administration disputed Raisi’s comments on Monday evening, saying recent U.S. efforts to facilitate ongoing peace talks between Yemen’s Houthi rebels — who are backed by Iran — and Saudi Arabia, and a potential

normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, demonstrate a determined U.S. effort to reduce tensions in the region.

Biden and his aides are coming to New York with a message that the United States is open to diplomacy, whether that means delicate prisoner swaps with Iran or smoothing relations between the region's geopolitical and sectarian rivals.

"Generally speaking, the region's about as stable as it has been in many years," said a senior U.S. administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic moves. "I believe a lot of that is due to some pretty smart — often backroom — U.S. diplomacy."

On Monday night, Biden told Democratic donors that he hoped to press upon world leaders this week the notion that America "is back." He has often used that phrase to convey a U.S. return to global leadership following the presidency of Donald Trump, whose approach often involved disrupting or withdrawing from traditional alliances.

The president will attend four political fundraisers during his four-day stay in New York, signaling that the 2024 campaign season is starting to heat up.

Also on Tuesday, Biden will meet with U.N. Secretary General António Guterres and host a meeting with leaders of five Central Asian countries. In the evening, Biden and first lady Jill Biden will host a reception for world leaders at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

On Wednesday, the president will hold a bilateral meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and the two will then host an event with American and Brazilian workers. The labor event comes amid worker strikes across the United States.

Biden will also meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It will be their first face-to-face encounter since Netanyahu won his election last fall and initiated changes to the country's judicial system that have been widely criticized as anti-democratic and have been met with massive protests in Israel. Relations between Biden and Netanyahu have often been frosty, and this week's meeting comes in the absence of a more formal event for the Israeli leader at the White House.