

THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY AND FISCAL YEAR BUDGET REQUEST

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY AND FISCAL YEAR BUDGET RE- QUEST

Monday, June 7, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., via Webex, Hon. Gregory Meeks (Chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman MEEKS. The Committee on Foreign Affairs will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any point, and all Members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length of the limitation in the rules.

To insert something into the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

As a reminder to Members, please keep your video function on at all times even when you're not recognized by the Chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves.

Consistent with House rules, staff will only mute Members as appropriate when they are not under recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum, and I now recognize myself for opening remarks.

Pursuant to notice, we meet today to review the State Department's foreign policy strategy and the Fiscal Year 2022 budget requests.

Mr. Secretary, it is fantastic to have you back before our committee so soon after your testimony before us in March, and this is precisely the kind of relationship that we seek with the Administration—one of regular constructive dialog and debate. And we're so glad that you're here and we appreciate you setting the tone from the top at the State Department on maintaining a productive engagement with Congress as we carry out our oversight legislative responsibilities.

An Administration's budget demonstrates its priorities. As President Biden said when he was a senator, "Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget and I'll tell you what you value."

So I'm pleased to see that Fiscal Year 2022 budget requests strive to direct funding directly to address what I believe are America's most promising opportunities and pressing challenges.

As you heard me say the last time you appeared before this committee, Secretary Blinken, personnel is policy, and if the United States wants to continue with its global leadership role, it is crit-

ical that the Department's work force look like the America it represents abroad with a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

This was a key component of our bipartisan State authorization bill that was passed in the House a few weeks ago, and though I welcome the more than doubling of the funding dedicated to broadening recruitment and diversity and inclusion programs at the State Department in the Administration's Fiscal Year 2022 budget request, I'm hopeful the department will soon provide us specific programs it will undertake to address the systemic barriers to retention and promotion for ethnic and racial minorities in the mid and senior levels.

Let's continue to build on that work, including by shifting to paid internships in the department. Internships help open the doors to careers in foreign affairs, and without a paid internship program these opportunities are accessible only to those from more affluent backgrounds.

A paid internship program will help broaden the pool of candidates interested in pursuing a career in public service at the State Department.

I also applaud the Administration for proposing to increase the U.S. contribution to the Green Climate Fund and more than tripling climate funding across the board. Climate change is, indeed, an existential threat with a shrinking window for action.

Not only does America need to work multilaterally with our allies and partners and even competitors, we must galvanize global action, and as the wealthiest nation on Earth, it is incumbent upon us to help those nations adapt, whether it be through implementation of clean energy or resilient infrastructure.

This is one example of coalition building on which America must lead. Now that the United States is back at the table, effective multilateral engagement is critical, and this starts with fully funding the United States commitments to the United Nations, including by paying down our arrears.

As you know, the U.N. has long served as a force multiplier for the United States to protect our interest and promote democracy, human rights, peace, and stability, and I appreciate that the President's budget request does a far better job of prioritizing our multilateral commitments than the previous Administration ever did.

However, we must recognize that continuing to avoid our full financial obligations is against our interests and costs us our credibility and champion multilateralism.

We must also forge new bonds

[inaudible] including our Latin American and Caribbean neighbors in the Western Hemisphere and the continent of Africa, and we need to modernize not only working with governments and regional organizations but also directly with local civil society and historically marginalized communities.

And the committee is pleased to see the Department's continued support for close allies such as the State of Israel and related efforts to improve the lives of the Palestinian people and leave the door open to a two-State solution.

So I look forward to the discussion today on this budget request and a range of other foreign policy matters that I know will come

up, and to also listen to the Administration's plan to provide COVID vaccines globally, to strengthen our posture in the Indo-Pacific region, to seeking a lasting peace between our ally, Israel, and the Palestinian people.

Success rests on ensuring that the brave men and women of the State Department have the resources to do the critical work you do every day to advance and defend America, work for which this committee is very grateful.

I now will recognize Mr. McCaul, the Ranking Member, for his opening remarks.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Secretary, for joining us here today.

I've repeatedly said that Vladimir Putin is not our friend. In addition to last year's SolarWinds hack in my hometown of Austin, he and his cronies are responsible for at least three additional cyber attacks in the last 2 months, including two on U.S. companies which seriously disrupted our supply chain.

He continues his illegal occupation of Crimea. He orchestrated the poisoning of Alexei Navalny. He publicly reports and supports the illegitimate despot Lukashenko in Belarus, even though he scrambled a MiG to hijack a commercial airliner to arrest the journalist, and he's holding two Americans hostage, Trevor Reed and Paul Whelan.

Yet, late last month, the Biden Administration made the baffling assertion that waiving sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, a Russian Gazprom subsidiary, and its CEO and corporate officers is somehow in the U.S., quote, "national interest."

Let me be clear. Allowing a Russian malign influence project to be built that will enrich Putin, give him greater strength in Europe, and further endanger Ukraine is absolutely not in our U.S. national interest.

Now President Biden is rewarding Putin with a summit in Geneva next week. This sends a very powerful and very dangerous message. It is my hope this summit will provide at least some good.

So I would urge you and the president to call for the release of Trevor Reed and Paul Whelan as a precondition to this meeting.

Now I'd like to turn to Afghanistan. I made very clear I oppose the ill-advised and arbitrary withdrawal from Afghanistan. But the decision has been made.

Now we must mitigate the fallout, and that starts with honoring our promises to those Afghans who risked their lives to work alongside our troops and personnel.

I've spoken with officials at your departments as well as people at DHS, and their conclusion is that there's no way to process enough Special Immigrant Visas for these Afghans to withdraw by September 11th.

So, Mr. Secretary, the clock is ticking, and the Taliban are on the march. And that's why I'm calling for this Administration to evacuate any person who has reached a significant stage in the security vetting process to a third country to finish their visa processing before the U.S. completes its military retrograde.

The time for platitudes and vague promises are over. We need action and we need it yesterday. While we have, certainly, turned

a corner in our fight against COVID-19, the devastating impacts are still being felt in this country and around the world.

More than 3.5 million people worldwide have lost their lives, including approximately 600,000 Americans. I want to thank the president for finally calling for a full investigation into the origins of COVID-19, and I also want to thank the Chairman for organizing last month's classified briefing on the topic.

Last year, I conducted an extensive investigation into the origins of COVID, and I would like to submit that here for the record and send you a copy, Mr. Secretary.

[The information referred to follows:]

*****COMMITTEE INSERT*****

Mr. McCaul. I hope you will provide guidance to the Administration as you vigorously search for answers. If we cannot get to the bottom of how this happened, we are doomed to watch as history repeats itself.

And if it turned out this did leak from a Chinese lab, it's just one more example of how the CCP's malign behavior damages the entire world.

Confronting the generational threat posed by the CCP isn't a Republican issue or Democrat issue. It's an American issue, and it's vital we work to solve this issue, as this committee has already done with our bipartisan genocide resolution.

So I thank Chairman Meeks for working with me on this important resolution. I urge Speaker Pelosi to bring it to the floor for a vote as soon as possible.

And, Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you again today for joining us. The world is facing many crises. As we speak, new reports from Ethiopia find 2 million people have been displaced in failing conditions that are threatening the lives of millions more in Tigray.

Starvation is being used as a weapon of war there. The work of the U.S. State Department and this committee's oversight has never been more important.

And with that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. McCaul. With that, I'll introduce our witness.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken was sworn in as the United States Secretary of State on January 26th, 2021, and he really needs no further introduction than that. We know of all of his past work, and as I mentioned in my opening statement, Secretary Blinken testified before this committee in March, and here he is again, just a short time thereafter to appear before us again, and we are grateful for his appearance before the committee again today to present the Administration's budget request.

So without objection, Secretary Blinken's prepared testimony will be made part of the record, and I now recognize the witness for 5 minutes to summarize his testimony.

You're on, Mr. Blinken.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ANTONY J. BLINKEN,
SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, all committee Members, thank you very, very much for this oppor-

tunity to talk about our proposed budget and how it will help achieve our national security priorities and deliver results for the American people, which is what I know all of us are about.

This is a critical moment for the United States and our global leadership. We face major tests—you’ve alluded to some of them already—including stopping COVID-19, rising to the challenge of the climate crisis, supporting a global economic recovery that delivers for our workers and their families.

We have got to revitalize our alliances and partnerships, outcompete China, and defend the international rules-based order against those who would seek to undermine it, renew democratic values at home and abroad, and push back against malign activity by our adversaries.

In a more competitive world, other countries are making historic investments in their foreign policy toolkits. We need to do the same. That’s why in this budget we have requested \$58.5 billion for the State Department and USAID for Fiscal Year 2022.

Here are some specifics. This budget will strengthen global health. The United States has been a leader in this field for decades in Africa, around the world.

We’re asking for \$10 billion for global health programs, including nearly \$1 billion for global health security to help us prevent, prepare for, and better respond to future global health crises so we can stop outbreaks before they turn into pandemics that put our safety and our prosperity in danger.

The budget will accelerate the global response to climate change and the climate crisis by providing \$2.5 billion for international climate programs, including \$1.25 billion for the Green Climate Fund to help developing countries implement climate adaptation and emissions mitigation programs, which is directly in our interest as well.

The budget will double down on the fight for democracy, which, as we all know, is under threat in too many places. Our budget requests includes \$2.8 billion in foreign assistance to advance human rights, to fight corruption, to stem the tide of democratic backsliding, and strengthen and defend democracies, for example, through technical training for elections and support for independent media and civil society. It also requests \$300 million for the National Endowment for Democracy.

The budget will support a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. It will—it will invest \$861 million in the region as a first step toward a 4-year commitment of \$4 billion to help prevent violence, reduce poverty, curtail endemic corruption, and expand job and educational opportunities.

The budget will reestablish U.S. humanitarian leadership with a request for \$10 billion in assistance to support refugees, victims of conflict, and other displaced people, and to rebuild our refugee admissions program.

It will support our partners in the Middle East by fully funding our commitments to key countries, including Israel and Jordan, and by restoring humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and includes a budget request of \$3.6 billion to pay our assessed contributions in full to international organizations, initia-

tives, and peacekeeping efforts, including to restore our annual contributions to the World Health Organization.

As China and others work hard to bend international organizations to their world view, we need to ensure that these organizations instead remain grounded in the values, principles, and rules of the road and rules of the world that have made our shared progress possible for so many decades.

Finally, to deliver in all of these areas, the budget reinvests in our most vital asset, our people. It will provide new resources to recruit, train, and retain a first rate diverse global work force with nearly 500 additional Foreign and Civil Service positions, the largest increase to the State Department staffing in a decade.

And it will modernize our technology and cybersecurity, protect our embassies and consulates, and include a direct appropriation of \$320 million for consular services worldwide so we can continue to provide these vital services to Americans and those who seek to travel, study, or do business in the United States.

Our national security depends not only on the strength of our armed forces, but also our ability to conduct effective diplomacy and development. That's how we solve global challenges, forge cooperation, advance our interests and values, protect our people, and prevent crises overseas from turning into emergencies here at home.

And that's why diplomacy and development are smart investments for our taxpayers. A top priority for me as Secretary is to restore the traditional role of Congress as a partner in our foreign policymaking.

That's the spirit that I bring to today's conversation, and I'm grateful for the chance to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Blinken follows:]

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken
Opening Statement on Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request
House Foreign Affairs Committee
June 7, 2021

Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, and all Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to talk about the Biden-Harris Administration's proposed budget – and how it will help us achieve our national security priorities and deliver results for the American people.

This is a critical moment for the United States and our global leadership. We face major tests, including stopping the COVID-19 pandemic, rising to the challenge of the climate crisis, and supporting a global economic recovery that delivers for American workers and families. We must revitalize our alliances and partnerships; out-compete China and defend the international rules-based order against those that seek to undermine it; renew democratic values at home and abroad; and push back against malign activity by our adversaries.

In a more competitive world, other countries are making historic investments in their foreign policy toolkit. We must do the same. That's why, in this budget, we've requested \$58.5 billion for the State Department and USAID for Fiscal Year 2022.

Here are some specifics.

This budget will **strengthen global health**. The United States has been a leader in the field for decades, in Africa and around the world. We're asking for \$10 billion for global health programs, including nearly \$1 billion for global health security, to help us prevent, prepare for, and respond to future global health crises so we can stop outbreaks before they turn into pandemics that put our safety and prosperity in danger.

This budget will **accelerate the global response to the climate crisis** by providing \$2.5 billion for international climate programs, including \$1.25 billion to the Green Climate Fund, to help developing countries implement climate adaptation and emissions mitigation programs – which is directly in our own interest.

It will **double down on the fight for democracy**, which is under threat in too many places. Our budget request includes \$2.8 billion in foreign assistance to advance human rights, fight corruption, stem the tide of democratic backsliding, and strengthen and defend democracies – for example, through technical training for elections and support for independent media and civil society. It also requests \$300 million for the National Endowment for Democracy.

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It includes a budget request of \$3.6 billion to pay our assessed contributions in full to **international organizations, initiatives, and peacekeeping efforts**, including to restore our annual contributions to the World Health Organization. As China and others work hard to bend international organizations to their worldview, we must ensure that these organizations instead remain grounded in the values, principles, and rules of the world that have made our shared progress possible for decades.

Finally, to deliver in all these areas, this budget will **reinvest in our most vital asset – our people**. It will provide new resources to recruit, train, and retain a first-rate, diverse global workforce, with nearly 500 additional Foreign and Civil Service positions – the largest increase for State Department staffing in a decade. And it will modernize our technology and cybersecurity; protect our embassies and consulates; and include a direct appropriation of \$320

million for consular services worldwide, so we can continue to provide these vital services to Americans and those who seek to travel, study, or do business with the United States.

Our national security depends not only on the strength of our armed forces but also our ability to conduct effective diplomacy and development. That's how we solve global challenges, forge cooperation, advance our interests and values, protect our people, and prevent crises overseas from turning into emergencies at home. And that's why diplomacy and development are smart investments for American taxpayers.

A top priority for me as Secretary is to restore the traditional role of Congress as a partner in our foreign policy making. That's the spirit I bring to today's conversation, and I'm grateful for this chance to answer your questions.

Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Secretary, and I'm now going to recognize Members for 5 minutes each pursuant to the House rules, and all time yielded is for the purposes of questioning our witness.

Of course, I will recognize Members by committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. And if you miss your turn, please let our staff know and we'll come back to you.

If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphone and address the Chair verbally and identify yourself so that we know who is speaking. I will hold strictly to the 5-minute rule so that we can get as many questions in as we can.

The Secretary has graciously given us three and a half hours, and we intend, as I've said, Mr. Secretary, if you could keep your answers brief and if the Members can make sure that they stay within the confines of that 5 minutes.

Unfortunately, because of that, I will have a strict 5-minute rule, and I will start with that strict rule for myself. So I'll ask you, Mr. Secretary, to be succinct with your answers as I must try to get in some questions and we have got a lot around the room.

So I'm going to leave some for some of my colleagues who are going to be asking you about questions, I'm sure, about the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific, et cetera.

But I want to start out now with my 5 minutes of questions, and I'll start out about COVID and the vaccines and vaccine diplomacy, particularly as we look at our friends and allies to our south, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

I was pleased to see the Administration's plans for the initial distribution of vaccines bilaterally through COVAX including to, of course, our neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To me, that was an important first step toward supporting the region and their recovery for this pandemic and one I encouraged the Administration to take.

So my question is when do you expect these vaccines to arrive in the region and what support is the U.S. providing to actually distribute these vaccines and provide overall support for their health response?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And you're right, we are very, very aggressively now pushing out vaccines. We have 80 million vaccines that will be distributed either working through COVAX and with COVAX, or directly by the United States—80 million vaccines between now and early July.

So this is happening—starting to happen as we speak. We want to make sure that anything we send out is safe and effective. But it's starting now and it's going to roll out over the coming days and weeks between now and the end of July. And as you noted, we have dedicated—we started—of the 80 million that we have currently available we're starting with 25 million.

We have allocated them by region and within regions by country. About 75 percent of that first 25 million will be done in coordination with COVAX. The other 25 percent we'll be able to do directly, making sure that we're taking account of the science and the needs where there are surges, where there are variants, where some countries need second shots and have a deficit, all of this based on

science, based on equity, and without political favor being demanded in return, unlike some other countries.

By the time we complete the distribution of these 80 million, there will be more to follow as we have excess vaccines in the months beyond July. And beyond that, we are working to increase significantly the international production of vaccines so that the overall supply of vaccines increases significantly.

Latin America, our neighbors, our partners in the region, in the Caribbean, will be among the first beneficiaries of the vaccines that are going out. We are working closely to make sure that we have in place the support system necessary so that the vaccines can get there, be distributed and used effectively.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you for that. And I have another question about the Northern Triangle. I'm going to jump to the other side of the world real quick in the time that I have left, and that is to talk about last month I unveiled the Ensuring American Global Leadership and Engagement Act, or what we call the EAGLE Act, which will reinvigorate our institutions and our diplomatic efforts to effectively respond to the challenges posed by China and boost U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

In these efforts, we must attack from a position of strength that emphasizes human values that set our Nation apart including multilateralism and building relationships, promoting human rights and democracy, and leading the fight against climate change.

So my question to you, Mr. Secretary, is what do you see as the most critical step to take to advance U.S. engagement, values, and interests in the Indo-Pacific region, and how is the Administration's budget request supporting those steps? And is that enough—do you think it's going to be enough?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, thank you for putting the spotlight on that. As you know, from your own engagement and leadership, this is the fastest growing, most dynamic region in the world and it's on the front lines of the strategic competition that we have with China.

By the way, China invests about 50 percent of its global assistance and 50 percent of its economic diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. So this is, clearly, a priority for them. We are working closely with partners to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, and our budget reflects that.

We have a significant budget allocation for work in the Indo-Pacific that we hope that the Congress will support, and this will help us engage effectively in the region.

I think you know that the president held the first ever leader summit among the so-called Quad countries—the United States, India, Japan, Australia. We are working with them across a number of fronts to strengthen the work that we do together in the region.

We have a number of tools that I know this committee and others believe strongly in to make us even more effective in the work we're doing.

For example, with our economic diplomacy, we have the Development Finance Corporation and other tools that we're bringing to

bear in the region on different projects, leveraging the private sector.

But I think, as you'll see as you look at the budget request, we have asked for a significant allocation of resources for our work in the Indo-Pacific.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. My time has expired.

I now go to Ranking Member McCaul for his questions. You have 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Last month, Chairman Meeks and I sent you a letter on these Special Immigration Visas regarding Afghans who have worked with us over the years. General Milley said, quote, "We must remain faithful to those Afghans who risked their lives to help the United States troops and personnel," and he said we must, quote, "Do what's necessary to ensure their protection and, if necessary, get them out of the country."

Just last week, Secretary Austin ordered General McKenzie to develop a plan to evacuate these people. But we need a place to temporarily house them while their visas finish processing, which falls within the State Department.

And most importantly, we need President Biden as commander in chief to give the order. The military retrograde in Afghanistan could be complete as early as July, according to latest reports, and I've been told by your senior officials in your department that there's no way the Special Immigrant Visas can be processed that quickly.

So that means that these people will have a bull's eye and a target on their back from the moment we leave the country. According to No One Left Behind, there have been 300 targeted killings of these people since 2014, and if we abandon them we are signing their death warrants.

Have you spoken to any country about temporarily housing these Afghans, to process these visas? And if so, which countries and where are you in negotiations?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much for that question. I appreciate it because I share both your concern and your commitment to those who put their lives on the line to help us in Afghanistan—our diplomats, our military—and let me do two things, if I can.

First, let me just, in direct response to your question, we are looking very actively at every possible contingency to make sure that we can accommodate and care for those who are seeking—who've helped us and are seeking to leave.

And whether that's through the Special Immigrant Visa program, whether that's through the refugee program, whether that's through parole, other things, we're looking very actively at everything.

Let me just quickly tell you where I think we are with the Special Immigrant Visa program itself. There are about 18,000 so-called principal applicants in the system. Of the 18,000, half are at the very early stages, by which I mean they've expressed interest. They haven't submitted applications or forms but we think they're interested.

Then there's another 9,000 who are much further along. Of those 9,000 about 30 percent are awaiting so-called chief of mission approval. That is the approval that the chief of mission gives to determine that they are in fact eligible for the—for the program.

Once that determination is made, they move into the immigration process and that's where about another 20 percent of them actively are. We have backlogs. When it came to chief of mission approval, we had a backlog of about 5,500. We have surged staff, mostly here in Washington because a lot of this work is actually done in Washington.

We're adding by the end of July at least 50 people here in DC to expedite this. We expect to be able to clear the backlog over the next few months at about the pace of a thousand a month.

We have also had an immigration backlog, those who are past chief of mission approval and are in the immigration process. That's because we have had challenges interviewing folks in Kabul.

But there, and that was slowed by COVID, we have cleared that backlog. It was about 1,400. We're scheduling appointments in regular order. We have a quarterly report coming to you that will show, I think, the progress.

The current cap, as you know, for Special Immigrant Visas for Afghanistan is 26,000. That's what's been allocated. We have used 15,000, so we have got 11,000 left to accommodate, potentially, these 18,000 if everyone who's expressed interest actually follows through.

So we're asking your support to add 8,000 to our cap so that we can accommodate everyone, and then be able to come back to you if we need more. But we are seeing—

Mr. MCCAUL. And if I could just—yes, if I could reclaim my time. And I feel very confident on the National Defense Authorization we will increase that cap that you're requesting.

Again, though, they're—we only have 2 months before the DOD is completely out of Afghanistan, leaving these people behind? Is the department considering a process to get them out of country while these claims are being processed that I've been told could take up to a year or two, possibly?

Secretary BLINKEN. Two things, quickly. We're considering every option. Yes.

Second, I do not think that the fact that our forces are withdrawing—one, we're not withdrawing. We're staying. The embassy is staying. Our programs are staying. We're working to make sure that other partners stay. We're building all of that up, and whatever happens in Afghanistan, if there is a significant deterioration in security, that could well happen. We discussed this before.

I do not think it's going to be something that happens from a Friday to Monday. So I would not necessarily equate the departure of our forces in July, August, or by early September with some kind of immediate deterioration in the—in the situation.

Mr. MCCAUL. Well, I think you're going to have a humanitarian crisis and a refugee crisis, and I think humanitarian parole is something, as you mentioned, we should be looking at as well.

I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Mr. Brad Sherman—Representative Brad Sherman of California—for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, not only for your second visit to our committee for a formal hearing but your availability to us as individuals. I hope that the Administration will support a prohibition on Americans purchasing Russian State debt or loaning money to Russian sovereign—the Russian sovereign or State-owned enterprises, not just Americans acting as underwriters but Americans buying in the secondary market. That could raise Putin's borrowing costs by about half a percent.

In 2019, Congress recognized the Armenian genocide. I want to commend the Administration for doing the same in April of this year.

However, the Administration has issued a Section 907 waiver to allow for the sale of weapons to Azerbaijan, and I hope that you would reconsider that in light of Azerbaijan's violations of the territorial integrity not of Nagorno-Karabakh, although that is important, but of Armenia itself in an unprovoked aggression.

As to Myanmar—Burma—you have come before Congress asking for another \$106 million in aid. The Marshall Plan demonstrates that economic aid can help a government stay in power, and I hope that you would reevaluate your request for education, economic development, and agriculture assistance, in light of the fact that that money might help the regime stay in power and the incredible needs that we have to help Africa, the Caribbean, and the Northern Triangle countries.

But I hope also in your policy toward Burma that you'll be fighting for full citizenship for the Rohingya people. Even those who are champions of democracy are resisting making that pledge and are, unfortunately, talking only about respecting Burma's existing and hostile laws.

I hope that you'll work with Congress over the years to repeal the Helms Amendment and allow our international funds to provide abortion care around the world.

I want to thank you for everything the Administration is doing to help countries around the world deal with COVID, but, particularly as co-Chair of the India Caucus—everything you're doing for India.

As you come before us to talk about the budget, one issue that you'll always confront is where should work be done. Should it be done in Foggy Bottom or in our foreign missions?

Having an American citizen overseas costs two or three times as much to provide the security, the housing, the education, the private sector, and we here in this committee are doing business differently. This is a virtual hearing.

And I hope that you will reevaluate, and you may determine that you're—that the no change should be made, but at least reevaluate. For example, should a visa interview be done onsite or by Zoom?

Now, Hamas has fired 4,500 rockets into Israel for the sole purpose of killing as many civilians as possible. Every one of these rockets was a war crime. President Biden has committed to replenish Israel's missile defense system. We have saved countless Israeli civilian lives and also countless Palestinian lives by helping bringing this fight to a more speedy conclusion.

Every one of those 4,500 rockets that was an attempt to kill as many civilians as possible is a war crime. Unfortunately, we will not bring the criminals to the International Justice, but we can prevent those crimes in the future by replenishing Iron Dome. What is the status of potential supplemental assistance for missile defense for Israel?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Congressman. I appreciate all the comments that you've made. You put the light on a number of very important subjects, which I very much appreciate.

With regard to Iron Dome, we're committed to its replenishment. The Israeli defense minister was in Washington. I met with him. Most importantly, Secretary Austin met with him. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan did, and we are working with the Israelis to fully understand their needs and working with Congress, most importantly, to make sure that we can secure the funding for that replenishment.

So these are—this is under very active review, and we look forward to working with you to make sure that that happens.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey, who is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights, for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Mr. Secretary. Two decades ago, the great Jewish human rights leader and former political prisoner in the Soviet Union Natan Sharansky testified at one of my hearings on combating anti-Semitism.

He said, and I quote, "There are two important components in this new phenomenon of anti-Semitism. One is using an anti-Israeli campaign for strengthening anti-Semitism and the other is classical anti-Semitism, the old deep, primitive prejudices against Jews."

He proposed a simple formula for exposing anti-Semitism that masquerades as policy differences and he called it the three D test: demonization, double standard, and delegitimization.

I'd like to ask you, Mr. Secretary, do you and does the Administration regard the 4,000 missiles that were launched by Hamas against Israeli citizens, which was reminiscent of the bombing of—with the V2 in London by the—by the Nazis—did you see that as an act of violent anti-Semitism?

Second, could you tell us if, as prime sponsor of the law to create the Ambassador for combating anti-Semitism, will the president soon nominate that person? I hear that there's a name or names that are under active consideration.

Thirdly, May 18th I Chaired another hearing on the Lantos Commission on the Beijing genocide Olympics—as we all know, a genocide against Muslim Uighurs that is personally led by Xi Jinping.

In one statement, he said, "We will show no mercy." And, of course, what's happening in the gulags and all the elements of the U.N. Convention on Genocide, obviously, have been met. It is a horrific, horrific killing and change of forcing people to give up their culture.

And I wanted to ask you, one of our witnesses said that at the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, Xi Jinping said that among his goals for hosting the Olympics was to demonstrate to the world the superiority of China's political system and to promote its products worldwide. Doesn't sound like sports to me.

Some have suggested a mere diplomatic boycott, and I would ask you and I would appeal to you, that would not be enough when you put that side by side with a genocide to be going on simultaneously with the Olympics.

Will the Administration try to move the venue to another city, or will we lead a boycott of nations of conscience?

And finally, just speak to the issue on the budget. The U.S. Agency for Global Media has pretty much flatlined and yet, the Russians have really—and others, but they have really done a terrible focus against Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Liberty. Will that be brought up at the summit, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much. Appreciate all those questions. Yes, we're moving forward expeditiously with the envoy to combat anti-Semitism. I hope that's before the Senate very, very soon.

And with regard to Hamas, Hamas is engaged in terrorism, period, and the idea that the—that any country could accept and, for that matter, the world could accept a terrorist organization which is valid in its own charter to destroy Israel, to indiscriminately launch rockets against Israeli civilians, that anyone finds that acceptable or does not understand that it constitutes terrorism is hard to fathom.

And Israel has the right to defend itself against these attacks and we have stood strongly for that proposition.

With regard to the Olympics, we're consulting closely with other countries, with allies, with partners, to make sure that we understand what the common concerns are and, ideally, to establish a shared approach. So more on that in the weeks to come.

And with regard to our work on combating misinformation, I couldn't agree with you more. I think it's vital. Unfortunately, we have seen our competitors and adversaries engage in more and more of it.

We have a number of tools to do that. One of them is the Global Engagement Center, where we have asked for, I think, important resources. I think we have seen success in its efforts to expose misinformation, whether it's coming from Russia or whether it's coming from China, and very much would welcome the support that you can give to that request.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, just let me also say that I would disagree, respectfully, with my good friend, Mr. Sherman, on the issue of public funding for abortion.

I do believe that abortion takes the life of a child and wounds many women—harms many women, and the public funding for overseas abortion, i.e., the Helms amendment, the prohibition is strongly backed by the American people.

The most recent Marist poll in January show that 77 percent of the people are against publicly funding abortion overseas and domestically it's 58 to 60 percent in terms of the Hyde amendment.

So let's—

(Simultaneous speaking.)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Albio Sires of New Jersey, who's the Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy, for 5 minutes.

Mr. SIRES. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being with us for the second time. I know you have your hands full. But I am very concerned about the Western Hemisphere as I look around.

First of all, I'm glad to see that the budget request maintains a consistent level of funding for Cuban democracy and human rights programming. I thank you for that. They've been really cracking down on dissidents, and that should help.

I'm also very concerned about what's going on in some of these countries like Nicaragua, Venezuela, especially Colombia. It seems like the Russians, the Cubans, the Venezuelans, are happy to see what is going on with the stabilization of Colombia, and I'm happy that the Administration has decided to continue the assistance to Colombia.

People should have the right to demonstrate. They do not have a right to be killed. But this is important that we recognize that there are other groups who are trying to destabilize many of these countries in the region.

Nicaragua is very troubling to me. They keep putting the opposition in jail, and I would just like to hear what you have to say about some of these directions that these countries are going.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much. And, look, I share and we share many of the concerns you've expressed and we are very much focused on them. I was just in Costa Rica, and not only was that an opportunity to meet with our counterparts from a very strong and important partner, but we also had a meeting of all of the Central American foreign ministers and so I was able to spend time with them.

I recently met with my Colombian counterpart in Washington just a few days ago, and with regard to Colombia, first, I share the concerns that you've expressed. Colombia is a vital strategic partner for the United States.

We strongly support the 2016 peace accord with the FARC and its implementation, and they're a very strong partner as well, as you know, in counter narcotics, as well as making sure that we have rural development and security.

With regard to these protests, to your point, people have the right to protest peacefully and to make their views known, and the government needs to protect that right and to make sure that people can express their opinions peacefully.

We have called upon the police to respect that peaceful protest. We appreciate the government is investigating the use of excessive force and making sure there's accountability. At the same time, the government is working hard to bring together the different stakeholders in a dialog to address the issues raised by the protests and we applaud that effort.

With regard to Nicaragua, as you know very well, it continues to move in the wrong direction, not the right direction, including with the recent detention of the leading opposition leader, Mrs. Chamorro. We call for her immediate release as well as the colleagues who have been incarcerated as well.

Beyond that, for the past many months the Organization of American States has called on Nicaragua to take concrete steps to make sure that elections that it plans to hold can go forward freely and fairly.

And instead of heeding the call of the Organization for American States, instead of making good on its own commitments that it's signed up to in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, it continues to move in the opposite direction, squeezing space for the opposition, for civil society, making it impossible to hold free and fair elections.

I had an opportunity when I was in Costa Rica to briefly see the Nicaraguan foreign minister—he was there—and pressed him on behalf of the United States and the Organization of American States to make good on these commitments and to make good on putting in place measures that would allow free and fair elections.

He went on a long exposition of the allegedly positive things that the regime has done for the people, to which I responded, if you have that much confidence—

Mr. SIRE. Mr. Secretary, I only have about 30 seconds.

Secretary BLINKEN. All right. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you very much.

But I think we should keep an eye on Costa Rica because of all the Nicaraguans that are going there. I think they're trying—they're putting a lot of pressure on this country and they were one of our best partners.

Colombia, we have to keep an eye—there are groups in Colombia that are stirring things up that we do not seem to focus on, and we should really keep an eye on that. And I appreciate the Administration keeping the funding to one of our closest allies.

Thank you very much for being here. My time is up.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Steve Chabot of Ohio, who is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia and Nonproliferation, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Let me begin with this.

Mr. Secretary, how likely is it, in your opinion, that the COVID-19 pandemic began in that laboratory in Wuhan, China?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, I cannot put a percentage on it. I think there are two possible and likely scenarios. One is the one you just described, that it emerged from the laboratory. The other is that it was naturally occurring.

President Biden has ordered a comprehensive government wide review to try to get to the bottom of what happened. He initiated an initial review back in March. The results concluded that it was likely to be one of these two scenarios.

He's now asked on a 90-day basis for the entire government to really dig into everything we have, including working with experts, to see if we can make a determination. At the same time, we're

pressing the World Health Organization to move forward with its Phase 2 study to understand the origins.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that the economic interdependence with the Chinese Communist Party threatens American lives and prosperity, and the CCP is continuing to poison economic ties that were previously thought to be benign.

They're degrading Hong Kong's legal and financial system, contaminating supply chains with Uighur forced labor, and extracting technology from corporations as the cost of admission to China's market.

Secretary Kerry acknowledged before this committee that China's dominance in solar panel manufacturing comes with Uighur forced labor. What is the Administration going to do about the CCP's continuing economic exploitation that threatens our security, our economy, and our American way of life?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, a couple of things. First, with regard to the Uighurs and with regard to forced labor, we're working very hard to try to make sure that products made with forced labor do not come to the United States and, similarly, that our companies do not, one way or another, inadvertently aid and abet the repression of Uighurs or anyone else by the technology that we export, including surveillance technology.

We have a new executive order that covers that to try to make sure that we're using all the tools at our disposal to prevent that.

More broadly, to your question, we're working across the entire spectrum to deal with many of the things that you just—that you just raised, for example, building more resilient and diversified supply chains.

Second, working with countries around the world to shine a light on the need to have trusted vendors in their networks, especially when it comes to high tech, 5G, for example, to have laws on the books to allow them to do that and to make sure that, especially when it comes to sensitive areas of their economies or sensitive technology, they have their guard up and are not doing business with some of these vendors to include Huawei.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Let me move on.

Most fentanyl and fentanyl-related products in the United States, let's face it, originate in China. These substances continue to fuel the opioid crisis in this country.

President Biden has said he will make fentanyl a, quote, "top priority in our dealings with China," unquote. Have you spoken with the president about this issue and what adjustments have been made at the State Department to advance this priority?

Secretary BLINKEN. I've, certainly, spoken to him about it in the past. So you're exactly right, he is deeply concerned. He's deeply concerned by the countries that export precursors or export fentanyl to the United States, whether it's China, whether it's coming through Mexico and other places and we are very focused on that.

This is something that we engage directly with our Chinese counterparts and we are looking to see concrete action to stop and, certainly diminish the export of fentanyl or precursors to the United States.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Let me squeeze one more in.

The national security officials in the Biden Administration have argued that it would be destabilizing to clarify U.S. support for Taiwan's defense. Does the department agree with this sentiment, despite its being sharply at odds with the analysis of our uniformed commanders?

And, basically, I'm talking about the so-called strategic ambiguity, which I think is a terrible idea. Where are you at that—at this point on that?

Chairman MEEKS. Very briefly.

Secretary BLINKEN. I'm sorry?

Chairman MEEKS. I just said very briefly. Two seconds.

Mr. CHABOT. Very briefly.

Secretary BLINKEN. Sorry. We are committed to the proposition that Taiwan must have the means to defend itself and that is consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act. We have continued to provide significant equipment and sales to Taiwan for that purpose and I will continue to work closely with them.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you for that.

I now recognize Representative Gerry Connolly of Virginia, who's the president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Secretary, welcome back to the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Thank you so much for joining us today. As the Chairman indicated, I am serving on this—

Chairman MEEKS. We're having a hard time hearing you, Mr. Connolly. You're coming in very (inaudible). You're breaking up. It's hard to hear you, to understand you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Can you hear now?

Chairman MEEKS. Well, maybe. Let's go ahead and try it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Secretary, can you hear me?

Chairman MEEKS. Mr. Secretary, can you hear Mr. Connolly?

Mr. Secretary, can you understand Mr. Connolly?

Secretary BLINKEN. It's coming in a little—a little—

Chairman MEEKS. Choppy.

Secretary BLINKEN. Choppy. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I'm sorry, I—

Secretary BLINKEN. There we go. That sounded better.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I'm very far away in Fairfax.

Chairman MEEKS. There you go.

Mr. CONNOLLY. OK. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I was saying welcome back, Mr. Secretary. Thank you so much for joining us as at the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

As the Chairman indicated, I serve as the president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which, as you know, is kind of the legislative arm of NATO representing all 30 member countries and parliamentary delegations, as well as 12 associate Members.

Our top priority, our top priority, that we're recommending to the Secretary General and to our respective governments is the creation of a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO.

NATO is 71 years old. It has all the architecture imaginable in terms of collective security and military preparedness and cooperation, and interoperability and mobilization.

It has no architecture, none, dedicated to what we say we are organized around, namely, shared democratic values. We are experiencing backsliding among some Members. We see some backsliding among prospective Members.

We, certainly, experienced an insurrection in our own country at the cradle of democracy, at the Capitol. And so we feel that creating a center that could serve as a resource, a clearinghouse, best practices, the place people could go to how do you do judicial reform, how do you—how do you run a parliament in a democratic way, how do you build in accountability in prospective governments, we think, is long overdue.

And I was very pleased that the working group that's doing the spade work for the Secretary General in preparation of the strategic concept embraced our recommendation and recommended it.

We have taken this idea on the road to the Marshall Fund, the Wilson Center, lots of other bodies, most of whom have embraced it. So I want to commend the idea to you and strongly urge you to press it as a position of the United States with respect to the Secretary General.

But I'd also like to give you the opportunity to react.

Secretary BLINKEN. First, thank you. Thank you for all of the work that you and your colleagues have done in support of NATO. It's vital and the legislative connection could not be more important. So we're really grateful for that.

Second, we have, I think, an important opportunity at this upcoming NATO Summit to, hopefully, bless the work that Secretary General Stoltenberg has been doing to help NATO more effectively address exactly the kinds of challenges that you're talking about, including democratic resilience.

He has a NATO 2030 initiative, as you know very well, that incorporates some of these—some of these ideas, and revising the Strategic Concept is a critical piece of that.

The last time, as you know, it was revised was 2010, at this point in the Strategic Concept Russia was referred to as a partner and China was nonexistent. So we have our work to do. I think we also have a real opportunity that the president is deeply engaged in as we head to the summit meeting in just a few days.

So, in short, I think, and I expect and certainly hope that we'll see significant progress, in particular, in strengthening NATO to deal with democratic resilience.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, Mr. Secretary, our view, though, is that this has to be part of the architecture of NATO itself. It cannot be an outside center. We have outside centers. You know, democracy is not on a par with dealing with the cyber threat.

Democracy is the *raison d'être*, and I know you know this and believe it for why we have NATO, and from our point of view, shared democratic values are as potent an antidote to authoritarianism, propounded by Putin and Xi, as is our strength—our military strength. Otherwise, we become just another military bloc.

And so I just strongly urge you to take under advisement the idea of building into the architecture of NATO itself a Center for Democratic Resilience that could really serve as a resource not only for Members but for prospective Members. And I commend that thought to you.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Representative Joe Wilson of South Carolina, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism, for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Greg Meeks, for your bipartisan leadership.

Mr. Secretary, sadly, American media of the left have become a propaganda arm of Hamas terrorists. Sickening proof, a page of the New York Times 10 days ago, May 28th, picturing 64 dead children of Gaza and Israel, ignoring total Hamas responsibility.

But for the 4,500 rocket attacks by Hamas war criminals of Iranian missiles targeting Israeli families, no child would be dead.

But for Hamas using children as human shields no child would be dead. The photo display is a disgusting smear of Israel and the people of Israel.

What is your view of the American media coverage? What can the State Department do to provide the truth of the rocket attacks on families by Hamas with Iranian rockets?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I guess the first thing I'd say is that in my—in my position, the one thing I do not do is politics. I'll focus on the policy, and so I'll leave it to others to do the politics.

Second, to the point that you've made about Hamas, it is—it would be unacceptable for any country to have rockets rain down on it indiscriminately targeting civilians and not do something about it.

And as you know, we strongly supported Israel's right to defend itself, to defend its people, against these indiscriminate rocket attacks. As a democracy, Israel also has an extra burden to do everything it possibly can to avoid civilian casualties.

And I have to tell you, I think we're all—and irrespective of politics, we also cannot lose sight of the fact that lives were lost on both sides in this most recent conflict, including—

Mr. WILSON. Mr. Secretary, respectfully, this would have not occurred if there hadn't been rocket attacks. This was not just an incidental occurrence. The rocket attacks were the sole cause of the death of these children. And that's—it's not politics.

As a former journalist myself, I'm just shocked that we would have American media be so complicit in promoting a false narrative that Hamas is not totally responsible. And you can only make so many—and I've been to Israel to see mothers there protecting their children. It's just horrifying. And so we need to be specific and go after the war criminals. Congressman Sherman was correct.

And on another issue, in regard to the Iranian nuclear deal, there's an effort to resume that but there's no mention of addressing the Iranian efforts of ballistic missile capabilities.

There's only one reason for ballistic missile capabilities, is provide a nuclear attack against the people of America to promote their view death to America, death to Israel. Why is there no effort to include a bar against continuing development of intercontinental ballistic missiles?

Secretary BLINKEN. There are multiple egregious activities that Iran is engaged in including missile activity, proliferation, support for proxy groups, terrorism, destabilizing actions.

Each and every one would be even worse if Iran had a nuclear weapon or was on the threshold of having one. It would be able to act with even greater community.

So the first urgent thing that we need to do, if we can, is to try to put the nuclear problem back in the box that it was in under the agreement and, unfortunately, it has now gotten out of.

And that takes away not in the least from our ability and determination to deal with these other actions that Iran is engaged in, including the ones you rightly point to with regard to missiles.

Mr. WILSON. But their actions, clearly, indicate they're not serious, OK. They're developing missiles to deliver what they plan to do in the future. Additionally, there's no provision to stop regional instability by providing the rockets to Hamas and Hezbollah to attack Israel, by providing the rockets to the Houthis to attack Saudi Arabia, beginning with the Beirut bombing killing hundreds of Americans, the IEDs killing hundreds of Americans in Iraq. Why is there no reference to blocking the instability which Iran is promoting throughout the region?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, there are constant references to it. Not only references, efforts and actions taken to stop it, curb it, deal with it. But at the same time, we have a nuclear program that was in a box that is now escaping from the box.

Each and every single one of those activities is going to be even worse if Iran has a nuclear weapon or has the ability to produce one on very short order. So none of—these things are not inconsistent. We are working to deal with the nuclear program and to combat Iran's other actions in these other areas. We're committed to doing both.

Mr. WILSON. But——

(Simultaneous speaking.)

Mr. WILSON [continuing]. Thing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MEEKS. I now recognize Representative Ted Deutch of Florida, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism, for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Chairman Meeks, for holding today's hearing. I appreciate the commitment that you and the Ranking Member have made to this committee's engagement with the Administration, and Secretary Blinken, thanks for rescheduling your appearance here so quickly and we appreciate your willingness to keep an open line of communication.

I want to start just by acknowledging and thanking you and the Administration for the efforts on providing vaccines around the world. The commitment to distribute at least 80 million COVID-19 vaccinations worldwide by the end of this month is so important, and from Mexico to India, throughout Africa, Asia, the Amer-

icas, it's really critical that America leads here and you are, and we're grateful for that.

I also want to thank you for the Administration's strong commitment to fighting the disturbing rise in global anti-Semitism. Attacks are up 80 percent, and I know you're deeply and personally committed to combating anti-Semitism. I appreciate your statement today that the Department's going to move quickly to appoint a special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism. We look forward to seeing that happen very soon.

And I want to followup on your trip to the Middle East last week. Over the course of the 11-day conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Administration engaged in sustained quiet diplomacy, helping to facilitate the cease-fire agreement.

You and the president repeatedly reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself from a terrorist organization's rockets, and I'm deeply appreciative of the commitment the Administration has made to Israel's security, including the work that you're doing now as you committed again this morning to ensure the replenishment of Israel's life-saving Iron Dome missile defense system.

So just to followup on Mr. Wilson's question, Hamas launched 4,500 rockets over 11 days, rockets that have long been supplied with support from Iran. At the same time, the Administration is deeply engaged in indirect negotiations with Iran over mutual reentry into the JCPOA.

And as you and I have discussed previously, I support reentry into the JCPOA so long as it gets us to a stronger and longer deal, as you've committed, one that will ensure that Iran never gets a nuclear weapon and can lead to an international agreement with our P5+1 partners to limit the nonnuclear behavior of Iran, like its support for terror proxies, ballistic missile advancements.

So while talks have been ongoing, we are hearing troubling reports from the IAEA about their ongoing access to Iranian nuclear sites, failure to explain uranium traces at three sites.

We also have Americans still held hostage by Iran, and I will not miss an opportunity to raise the resolution of the case of my constituent, Bob Levinson. The Levinson family deserves closure from the Iranians.

So your position thus far has been compliance for compliance, the continuation of non-JCPOA sanctions leading to a deal that, as you say, is longer and stronger. There are some who are arguing once you lift any sanctions you lose the possibility of ever getting to longer and stronger.

I'd ask if you could help us understand the path from JCPOA reentry to a follow-on agreement, and at what point do we deal with the nonnuclear issues? When do those come into view and how do we address them?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Thank you very much, and thank you also for raising Bob Levinson. We're determined to bring closure and resolution to that as well as to bring home any arbitrarily detained American or any American held hostage anywhere. This is a real focus, irrespective of anything else that we're doing.

With regard to the JCPOA and any follow-ons, first of all, we're not—we're not even at the stage of returning to compliance for compliance. We do not know if that's actually going to happen.

We have been engaged in indirect conversations, as you know, for the last couple of months and it remains unclear whether Iran is willing and prepared to do what it needs to do in compliance. So we're still testing that proposition.

But to your point, what we what we do know, unfortunately, is that, meanwhile, its program is galloping forward. It has lifted restraints imposed on it by the agreement, including the amount of enriched material that it has, material that's now, in some cases, enriched up to 20 percent and even a small amount to 60 percent.

It has started to deploy some more advanced centrifuges. The longer this goes on, the more their breakout time gets down. The agreement, it pushed it to a year or more. It's now down by published reports to a few months at best, and if this continues, it will get down to a matter of weeks, exactly what we have sought to avoid and what the agreement stopped.

And so we have a real incentive, if we can, to at least put that back in the box and then, to your point, use it as a platform both to look at whether the agreement itself can be lengthened and, if necessary, strengthened. And also, to capture these other issues.

We're going to be in a much better place with our allies, with our partners who've wanted to stick with the agreement for all this time, to do exactly that, to insist that Iran engage on these other issues, and there will be a united front to hold them to—hold them to account.

We continue, as you know, even if—even with the agreement if we return to compliance to have all of these other tools, which we will very actively use to deal with the other problems presented by Iran.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary BLINKEN. But we are actively talking to our partners about exactly what—

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Darrell Issa of California for 5 minutes.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I guess the first question, as you know, in war-time we look to the military to look for peace, and in peace time we look for you to conduct many times things which are warlike.

In the case right now of vaccine distribution, China has aggressively denied countries that recognize Taiwan vaccines. Will you commit to either directly or through our allies to provide what would otherwise be available to those countries from China an equal or greater amount as part of our diplomatic efforts?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Congressman. We are—with the distribution of the vaccines and anything that follows from that, based on need, based on—based on science, based on equity, based on a whole series of factors, we're going to make sure that those who need it get it and that would include Taiwan.

Mr. ISSA. No, no, I wasn't talking about Taiwan. I was talking about countries in Central America that recognize Taiwan.

Secretary BLINKEN. I missed—I missed—I apologize. I missed your question. Yes. Yes.

Mr. ISSA. Yes. Right. And the question is the—you know, the equity, obviously, moves when China is denying them access to the drugs they—

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Yes. Yes, absolutely, and I think in the first allotment, the 25 million, about 6 million or so are dedicated to our own hemisphere, including Central America.

Mr. ISSA. OK. And I guess the second question goes right back to vaccines again. As you know, the Administration has committed or at least proposed that they may invalidate or set aside patents and other materials by those country or those companies which have vaccines and are supplying them under U.S. patents.

And I know that I'm not asking you to go against policy, but from a—from a practical standpoint, isn't one of your mandates to promote and defend our historic recognition of patents and trademarks and intellectual property?

And from an equally practical standpoint, 6 months from now, essentially, will not the entire world have had an opportunity to receive from one or another source at least the current vaccine?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Yes, protecting patents, protecting trademarks, protecting intellectual property is very much a part of our mission, our national mission and the State Department's mission.

In this case, first of all, as you know, this would be a very lengthy process, but a very now issue-bound time-bound exception. That's what's being discussed.

As we have looked at it, Congressman, I think the challenge we have is this. If we stayed on the current course before we were distributing the 80 million, before we're looking at increasing production around the world, not just in the United States, we're on track to have the world vaccinated or at least to have 75 or so percent of the world vaccinated not until 2024. And even if we're fully vaccinated, as you know, that does not do it because variants start to perk up, spread and come back. Economies—

Mr. ISSA. Yes, and if I can—if I can quickly—

Secretary BLINKEN. Please.

Mr. ISSA [continuing]. Focus the question, there were only a relatively small amount of laboratories and facilities around the world in maybe 15 or 20 countries that have the capability of producing safely and effectively these drugs and a fraction of those have the ability to develop them.

From a practical standpoint, many of the countries that would see these invalidated do not currently and are not likely to have the ability to safely produce them. And, of course, the technology, if it became widely available, would give China and some of our other adversaries—Russia—access to technology that allows them to compete.

Isn't there a way to encourage or facilitate those additional assets to be put online to maximize production without giving up intellectual property to, if you will, our current adversaries?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Look, there may well be. We just want to make sure that we have every tool at our disposal to accelerate the production of and the access to vaccines.

So we want to make sure everything's on the table. We'll have to make a determination of what is most effective, what is most ef-

ficient, and also does not have unintended consequences, or second or third order effects that would be problematic.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you. And in order to save time, I'll followup with a suggestion offline.

Mr. Chairman, thank you. I yield back.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Karen Bass, who is the Chair of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights, for 5 minutes.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and, certainly, thank you, Mr. Secretary, for coming back to our committee again, and I actually wanted to followup on my colleague, Mr. Issa.

I, too, am concerned about intellectual property. But in this instance, I'm way more concerned about global health. And so I know that there are at least a couple of countries in Africa that are ready to manufacture and—vaccines, and so I wanted to know where we are in terms of that, exporting our technology to a manufacturer.

And I think that's so important, not just because of COVID but because of future pandemics. How do we think about the world in terms of increasing the capacity and not just thinking about the profits that can—that could be made?

So I wanted to ask you that. I have a couple of other questions, too, but maybe you could respond to that right now.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. And, in short, we need to do two things. Beyond the distribution of vaccines that we have access to, we need to increase production and that means both in the United States but also around the world.

And I think we also need to increase production capacity in different parts of the world for precisely the reasons that you cite, whether it's for this pandemic or for anything coming down the road in the future.

And it makes sense, certainly, on a regional basis, to have—to have countries that can be production hubs that's going in the future to facilitate getting vaccines out effectively and efficiently or other health products out effectively and efficiently.

So we're looking, in short, at that and looking to see what can be done to either increase or develop as necessary production capacity in different parts of the world, including Africa.

Ms. BASS. Now, I didn't see that in documents I looked in. Are there specific line items or categories of the budget that you are requesting to do just that? Is there any support that you need from us?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think that there are a couple of things. In our own budget, we have asked for resources dedicated to helping countries, including in Africa, better develop the capacity to detect, prevent, mitigate the potential outbreak of pandemic. So that's one category and that's very important.

When it comes to the production piece, I do not think—but let me—let me come back to you, if I can, on that. I do not think that's part of our—

Ms. BASS. OK.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Budget. But let me come back to you on it.

Ms. BASS. OK, no problem. I noticed that you had several accounts that were decreased in Africa. Ethiopia, for example, is \$34 million below. Kenya and Mali accounts are also decreased, too.

For Ethiopia, I'm wondering is that directly related to the conflict? And then I do not—I do not know why that would be the case with Kenya and Mali, especially given the problems that Mali is currently facing.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. With Ethiopia, we are more than deeply concerned about the situation in the country as a whole, but particularly right now in Tigray, and I think we need to look very carefully at the allocation of resources because, as you know better than I do, we not only have the horrific violence and the atrocities that have been committed, we now have a famine right on top of that.

Ms. BASS. Right.

Secretary BLINKEN. So I do want to go back and make sure that we have the appropriate resources dedicated to deal with that. In the first instance, though, we have to get humanitarian access.

We have to get a cessation of hostilities so that people can do their jobs. We have to get an end to the intentional destruction of food sources, which is one of—

Ms. BASS. So—

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Which is driving it. So I need to—I need to take a look and make sure that we are effectively resourced. And let me come back to you, in the interests of time, on the—on the other countries you reference.

Ms. BASS. OK. So the other area I wanted to ask you about is the staffing of the State Department. No. 1, when you entered, are you facing a large number of vacancies? I'm asking you that specifically in regard to the diversity issue because oftentimes when diversity is mentioned, people feel like they're going to lose something.

And so the commitment that I made to the Staff Association was that I would push for an expansion of mid-career positions. I want to know, do you need them? Did you encounter a large number of vacancies in general about the work force?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Thank you. Yes, we have significant vacancies to fill and we also have to have new positions in order to deal with many of the challenges that have already been alluded to this morning where we are understaffed or under resourced.

That's why we have asked for almost 500 new Foreign Service or civil service positions, including also, on top of that, 70 for global health security—

Ms. BASS. Are those career? Are any of those for career?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Yes.

Ms. BASS. OK. Great.

Secretary BLINKEN. And USAID would have the 70 or so positions. But I'd actually love to come back to you on some of the specifics, because we do have gaps that we need to fill and we need Congress' help. We very much appreciate the support for that.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. Thank you for that. The gentlelady's time has expired.

I now call on Representative Lee Zeldin of New York for 5 minutes.

Mr. ZELDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank for being here. You recently announced sanctions on the former president of Albania, Sali Berisha, for many that seemingly came out of nowhere. As far as a history of U.S. political associations, he was a guest, an ally, of the Bushes. He was also known to be an aggressive opponent of George Soros.

What specific information can you share with the committee at this time to justify this dramatic move?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. We continue to look across the board at those who are engaged in corrupt activities who are undermining human rights or pose a challenge to democracy or democratic principles.

We had—in his case, the case developed through the—through the normal process, including our lawyers, and I'd be happy—if it's helpful happy to share with you exactly what went into that.

Mr. ZELDIN. Yes. Is there any specific information that you can share with the committee at this time in this hearing?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do not have anything to share right now for the committee, but I'd be happy to come and make sure that we share that with you and anyone else who's interested.

Mr. ZELDIN. I tried to do some research as to what type of new information involving his corruption and I couldn't find anything. So where should anybody go—a member of the media, let's say, wants to find out information, because there's some back and forth going on right now between the State Department, your decision on the sanctions against him and his family, as well as Mr. Berisha's defense. Where would a member of the media go to get information on what corruption you're referring to?

Secretary BLINKEN. Sure. Two things. First, with regard to Members, before I get to the media, please come to our Office of Legislative Affairs and we'll make sure that you get the information.

And second, with regard to the media, of course, please come to the office of the spokesperson and Public Affairs, and we'll make sure that, consistent with whatever other obligations or restrictions we have, we make information available.

Mr. ZELDIN. OK. But are you aware of anywhere that is open source info backing up this claim that there was some new allegations of corruption involving Mr. Berisha?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think that certainly, anyone from the media can ask that question, for example, in the briefings that we do every single day at the State Department and get whatever information we have that's publicly available.

Mr. ZELDIN. Just to clear up one item of Mr. Berisha's defense, have you—I'm just trying to understand what's true and what's not true. Have you or anyone on your behalf had any communication with Mr. Soros and anyone on his behalf? Just trying to clarify what's true and what's not true.

Secretary BLINKEN. I have not. I cannot speak to the entire State Department, but I have not.

Mr. ZELDIN. If—with regards to the COVID origin question that you were asked, what would the U.S. actually do of substance to pressure China to give access to the lab if China does not grant that access?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, what we have seen, unfortunately, more than unfortunately, from the PRC since the beginning of this crisis is a failure to meet its basic responsibilities in terms of sharing information, providing access, and doing that in real time with transparency.

That was true at the start. It remains true, unfortunately, today, and I think what you're seeing is through the work that's being done, for example, at the WHO, the work that we're doing and the concerns expressed by countries around the world that there is a strong course insisting that China make good on its commitment—on its responsibilities to provide the information.

I do not want to get into hypotheticals, going forward, in the future about what we would or would not do. But I think I can say with confidence that there is going to be an increasing international demand that countries, including China, meet their responsibilities when it comes to providing information, access, and transparency on global health, including COVID.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. And there's just many in Congress who are skeptical of whether or not China is going to grant access to the labs and we're trying to understand what the next step is going to be if and when China says that lab access will not be granted.

Also, clarify one other point. Does the Biden Administration recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights?

Secretary BLINKEN. With regard to that, as a practical matter Israel has a control of the Golan Heights irrespective of its—of its legal status, and that will have to remain unless and until things get to a point where Syria and everything operating out from Syria no longer poses a threat to Israel, and we are not anywhere near that.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you for that. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Bill Keating of Massachusetts, who is the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, and the Environment and Cyber, for 5 minutes.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you for the State Department's work, particularly with trying to free Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed.

My question, first question is this. Despite sanctions, we have seen an escalation of attacks—cyber attacks in our country, disrupting the food production chain, disrupting our energy chain, and I have great concerns about that expanding to healthcare institutions as well, among so many others.

Despite these sanctions, they are escalating and they are becoming more of a concern. The president has moved domestically to try and shore up cooperation with the private side. We're advancing a bill here in our committee for the Cyber Diplomacy Act. What can we do to better coordinate and what suggestions do you have for dealing with this great threat?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. This is front and center in our focus, the cyber threat writ large and, of course, its most recent manifestations in terms of ransomware, which is deeply, deeply, deeply concerning.

So on that, let me just speak to that very quickly. We are working whole of government to develop a counter ransomware strategy to better protect all of our networks and, of course, this requires working closely with the private sector, since many of these things are controlled by the private sector, to disrupt and destroy ransomware infrastructure and ecosystems, to find and bring to justice those responsible, to build an international coalition to hold countries who harbor those engaged in ransomware attacks accountable and, of course, much more international coordination with regard to the use of infrastructure, money laundering, et cetera, that is required for these attacks, as well as getting at some of the crypto currency challenges to find ways to stop transactions.

So this is a whole of government effort and it is building out a comprehensive strategy. One of the things that President Biden will make clear to President Putin when he sees him is that States cannot be in the business of harboring those who are engaged in these kinds of attacks.

Mr. KEATING. I have legislation also in the CROOK Act, and I'm glad you mentioned President Putin because in Russia, as we know, this kind of nonactor activity would not go on without the knowledge or the tacit approval of Russia.

So I look forward to those discussions.

This Friday, Mr. Secretary, we're going to have the first hearing, to my knowledge, on the human rights issue dealing with the LGBTQI community. There's been progress in the Balkans in this respect. But in Russia, Poland, Turkey, and even Hungary, we have seen a greater concern for attacks on this civil rights issue.

The U.S. has to be in a leadership role in this regard, I think, to make progress. What could you—what do you advocate in terms of moving forward on this important human rights issue?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I very, very much agree with you. We are deeply concerned by not just the ongoing challenges to LGBTQI rights but actual backsliding in a number of places, which is not, in some sense, surprising since we're seeing backsliding on democracy writ large.

And this is very much a part of the State Department's portfolio and our work. We are engaging directly with countries where we're seeing either backsliding or the failure to uphold LGBTQI rights, and this is something that our Ambassadors are seized with, our diplomats are seized with, and I am seized with.

And so whenever—and whether it's in the countries that you referenced or others, when we're seeing a problem we're putting a spotlight on it. We're engaging with these countries to make sure they understand that we are—we're looking at this very, very closely and carefully and we want to see progress.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. It's great to hear that the State Department is going to take a leading role on this. It's an important priority. I'll have written questions on J-1 visas and other issues to come. But my time is waning quickly. So I want to thank you.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman yields back his time.

I now recognize Representative Brian Mast of Florida for questions.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here. Appreciate the time.

I just want to start with this question, Mr. Secretary, and that is this. Who is in charge of Gaza?

Secretary BLINKEN. Who's in charge of Gaza? As a practical matter, probably more than anyone Hamas.

Mr. MAST. I'm glad this is an acknowledgment that we can both agree on. Would you say that any Palestinian police forces did anything to try to disrupt the thousands of rockets that were fired into Israel?

Secretary BLINKEN. I guess I would distinguish—well, first of all, it's not clear what capacity they had. In terms of any forces in Gaza, absolutely not. As you know, Palestinian police forces in the West Bank work in coordination with Israel to try to provide for security in the West Bank.

There's been, I think, tremendous success with that over the years, and it's something that I know the Israelis value. But with regard to Gaza, no.

Mr. MAST. Nothing in Gaza. The Palestinian National Security Forces, they have no—I mean that they have a jurisdiction that they couldn't function in that way over there.

But as we talk about that and what's going on in Gaza and the thousands of rockets that were fired in May, those that were fired in April, those that were fired back in January, could you give any assurances that we're not going to be talking about rockets fired in July, August, September and throughout the year?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think I got the import of the question, Congressman. I lost you a little bit there. But can I give assurances that this will not happen again in the future? No, I cannot. And in fact, I think that underscores the importance as well as the urgency in making sure that as we engage in addressing the deep humanitarian challenges in Gaza and rebuilding and reconstruction, we do it in a way that does not benefit Hamas and allow it to further rearm or put itself in a position to engage in further attacks.

And it's also pretty hard to ask countries around the world to contribute to rebuilding and reconstruction if there is a real prospect that everything that is—that is rebuilt will wind up—wind up losing because Hamas decides to engage in further rocket attacks. I would hope that Palestinian people would see that Hamas has brought nothing but ruin and misery to them and—

Mr. MAST. So let's start with that. Let's go there a minute, Mr. Secretary. I know—I appreciate your time and you're answering these questions. Hamas is in charge there. Why would you say Abbas is cancer?

Let me ask it this way. Would you agree Abbas has canceled elections because in all likelihood Hamas would take the majority again, as they did previously back in 2006?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Abbas says that elections couldn't go forward because of the—because of the inability to vote in East Jerusalem. But I would certainly suspect that part of his calculation is concerned that Hamas would do—would do well in elections.

Mr. MAST. So it's not just that Hamas is taking over by force. If Hamas would do well in the elections, then we're talking about the people fundamentally supporting Hamas, which makes it a false

hope that the people would realize that they've been drastically hurt by Hamas and all of their—they would—in your speculation, as you've said, Hamas would probably win the majority of people voting for them.

Secretary BLINKEN. Hamas—Hamas feeds very effectively on despair and the lack of hope, and so in the absence of that, some people will, unfortunately, tragically, horrifically turn to extremes, which I think only underscores the imperative including for Israel's security, that we find ways to effectively offer—

Mr. MAST. It's not some people. It's the majority. It's the majority—

Secretary BLINKEN. Not necessarily. Again, it depends how—it depends how the—you know, the way the elections if there were elections go forward. Groups come together in coalitions.

If the Palestinian Authority groups are divided, they may well represent a majority of the people but still not win an election or Abbas might do better. There are all sorts of different permutations. But the point is, and I think an important point—

Mr. MAST. What's policy, though? I think we largely agree on this. We're, largely, agreeing that Hamas is in charge there and Hamas—Abbas certainly recognizes that Hamas may very well win a popular election, and we're going to give them hundreds of millions of dollars or invest hundreds of millions of dollars into their infrastructure.

Secretary BLINKEN. In a way that does not benefit Hamas and in a way that benefits the—

Mr. MAST. That's impossible. It's impossible to not benefit Hamas.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative David Cicilline of Rhode Island for 5 minutes.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being back before the committee and for your extraordinary work. In the 3-months since you last appeared before this committee, the United States has confronted an array of challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the developing world, climate change, the conspicuous rise of authoritarianism and the renewed crisis in Gaza.

It's clear that the United States needs to robustly fund the Department of State and the Agency for International Development and all of the related foreign affairs programs so that we can address the challenges of the 21st century head on.

And so my first question, really, is as we seek to reenter or reengage with the world and recenter our foreign policy of focusing on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as pillars of United States foreign policy, we need to ensure that our diplomats have all the tools that they need to do this work.

And Representative Bera and myself along with Senator Murphy and Senator Van Hollen have been leading on this proposal, Investing in the 21st Century diplomacy, a plan that would call for an increase of \$12 billion for State and USAID.

So the challenges are daunting and you are providing extraordinary leadership. But my question really is, are there enough resources there and what can we do to further support your work?

Because I think we all recognize that additional funding for key departments and agencies and programs are going to really be necessary to give our country the best chances of leading successfully.

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, I deeply appreciate that and deeply appreciate Congress' support for the resources that we need to effectively represent the United States and advance our interests around the world.

I think the budget requests that we're making answers the needs that we have, the gaps that need to be filled, both in terms of programs and also in terms of personnel.

And there are, as you know, a whole host of areas where we have to make sure that the State Department, USAID, the other agencies of our foreign policy, have not just the programmatic resources, which are vitally important, but the human resources necessary to do the work, and there are a number of areas where we have to build up even more our skill set.

I'm thinking particularly of global health, of technology and emerging technologies, climate and the environment, and, of course, China, the one country that poses economically, militarily, politically, diplomatically, the biggest challenge the United States.

So the budget requests tries to, among other things, fill some of those gaps and make sure that we're resourced appropriately.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I just want to get one more question in. I know human rights remain a priority for the Administration in a time when we have seen a real decline globally in human rights.

The LGBTQI community particularly has faced increased hostility from governments that seek to scapegoat LGBTQ people to shore up their political base or deflect from their failed leadership.

And while you've increased the number of things you've referenced—global climate change and gender equality and U.S. leadership in international organizations—funding for LGBTQ accounts have remained flat, and I just wonder how the Administration is going to meet this challenge—Congressman Keating mentioned it as well—of expanding the rights and protections for global LGBTQI populations with flat funding when the problem is really increasing dramatically all around the world, and kind of how you expect to meet that challenge with that flat funding.

Secretary BLINKEN. I think it starts with making it clear, as we have, that this is an important component of our—of our foreign policy and our diplomacy—that is, defending and protecting rights of LGBTQI persons.

And that's why, as I was discussing a little bit earlier with our colleague, from our embassies to right here at main State, in our engagements, in our conversations with counterparts around the world and in countries in particular where we have seen a failure to protect those rights or even backsliding on those rights, this is very much in—part of what we're talking to them about engaging with them on. So that—it starts there.

We will have an envoy to put full time focus on this work. That is vitally important, and that person and the team that the person has will be engaged with all of our different offices and all of our different bureaus to make sure that they are, in their own work, keeping a spotlight and keeping engagement on these issues.

So I think that based on the direction from me and from the president this is something that we have the ability and the commitment to focus on.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for that assurance. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Representative Ann Wagner of Missouri, who is the Vice Ranking Member of the full committee, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing the important meeting here today and hearing, and I want to thank you, Secretary Blinken, for your time.

Mr. Secretary, just yesterday you committed to holding China accountable for COVID-19's origins. I strongly agree. We all do. But talk is often cheap, and we all want to see action, a full investigation led by the United States of America.

As we continue to combat the coronavirus pandemic, we must be united in ensuring that the People's Republic of China cannot use this time of uncertainty to further undermine global prosperity, stability, and the rule of law.

We should have acknowledged that right from the outset of this devastating crisis. The Chinese Communist Party, or CCP, suppressed, they misrepresented, and they falsified information necessary to prevent a pandemic, and holding the CCP accountable is the only way to deter the release of another deadly virus on the global community in the future to ensure that the Communist Party stops violating international law and provide compensation to millions of Americans who suffered tragic unthinkable losses over the course of this pandemic.

That's why I introduced the Compensation for Americans Act in the 116th Congress, which will establish a compensation fund for those affected and allow the president to freeze Chinese assets to bring the Communist Party to this negotiating table, which has been used in the past, and it also gives the United States a comprehensive toolbox of punitive measures to further incentivize China's cooperation. I will again be introducing this legislation in the 117th Congress, and I hope my colleagues will support my efforts to ensure that the United States leads the way in holding the CCP accountable.

Secretary Blinken, the World Health Organization's abject failure to combat China's coronavirus—related misinformation campaign in the early days of the pandemic cost the international community precious time it needed to avert a crisis.

The WHO remains a deeply flawed institution and is highly susceptible, as you know, to China's malign influence. The president's budget request includes an additional \$124 million for the WHO.

I want to ask you, sir, is this funding contingent on the implementation of stringent reforms that will prevent totalitarian States like China from co-opting global health policy to serve their interests? If not, what leverages does the United States have to secure these badly needed reforms?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much. I very much agree with you that the WHO is in need of reform and that's precisely why the president reengaged the United States. It's very hard to be a strong advocate and successful advocate for reform when not

only are you not at the table, you're not even in the room, and in your absence, who is at the table and in the room? Well, China, among others.

So the very first step that was important to be taken was to re-engage the United States, and that puts us in a much better position and stronger position to advance the kind of reforms that you're talking about and that we agree on. That needs to happen and that's what we're focused on.

We also need to make sure that the WHO is appropriately resourced in order to carry out the important work with stronger tools and stronger commitments to prevent, detect, mitigate the next pandemic and that requires, among other things, not just that the WHO will have these tools and that commitment, but that countries including China live up to their responsibilities, which is what we're going to be focused on.

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Secretary—Mr. Secretary, whatever we can do to leverage the U.S. to secure these badly needed reforms must be done and must be done urgently.

The United Nations Population Fund, or the UNFPA, was complicit in the tragic and highly coercive implementation of China's one child policy, which relied on the use of forced sterilizations and abortions as forms of population control.

China is now restoring or resorting to similar tactics in its horrifying persecution of the Uighur Muslims.

Secretary Blinken, the Biden Administration is restoring us funding for the UNFPA. How can the United States justify sending taxpayer funds to an organization that looks the other way as China implements genocidal family planning programs.

And I know my time is short here. If you'd like to respond briefly or in writing, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. We conducted a very full review to make sure that any funding provided to the Population Fund would not be used in these ways and we're confident that's the case that they have not—the U.N.—this program is not engaged in coercive abortions or other coercive measures. On the contrary, it seems that it has—its influence has helped move China in the other direction.

Mrs. WAGNER. I yield back. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Ami Bera, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation, for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Mr. Secretary, I'll reiterate our gratitude for your availability both to the subcommittee, but I also want to recognize the men and women that work for you and how available they've been both to myself as well as to my subcommittee.

I also want to recognize the Chairman for his focus on the region and the complexity in the region.

Mr. Secretary, as we work on the budget process, I do want to make sure as we shift resources to the region, we also make sure the budget reflects that both in the East Asia and South and Central Asia bureaus.

I also want to associate myself with the Ranking Member, Mr. McCaul's, comments on addressing Afghanistan, the folks—the men and women—that supported our effort and mission there.

And, again, I know you and I have spoken about the Special Immigration Visa as well as the urgency of protecting these men and women.

So you'll find strong bipartisan support both in the committee as well as in Congress to get the resources necessary to honor our commitments.

I'm going to actually shift to a topic that hasn't come up. As someone who supported the Trans-Pacific Partnership, I'm not asking the Administration to reengage in that, although obviously, we'd like that.

It was a tool not just of movement of goods and services but also a geopolitical tool of strategy in setting the rules and norms.

I actually think you would find some support in Congress. Again, maybe it's not CPTPP but if we focused in on digital trade or something like that. I talk to our like-minded allies in the region, our friends in Singapore or New Zealand, Australia, Japan, there really is a hunger for a reengagement of the U.S., again, in setting the norms and the rules of movement of goods and services and on issues like data privacy, data localization.

I actually think you would find strong bipartisan support. I would just point to the strong support that USMCA had with over 193 Democrats and 192 Republicans voting in favor of moving that deal forward on the House side.

So I'd be curious, again I think there is strong bipartisan support for something in digital trade. I think it's urgent to protect our privacy but also to set those norms and rules and not let China set those norms and rules. So I'd be curious to your thoughts.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, thank you. I very much agree with the basic proposition. We need to be in the—in the business of helping to set these norms and rules, particularly when it comes to technology. That is something that we're engaged in a number of conversations on right now.

I also want to defer to my colleagues at USTR and other—Commerce, other places, that are very much focused on this. But I agree with the basic point, and I think you'll see the United States both engaged and leading in those areas.

Mr. BERA. Great. And again, I think you'll find a bipartisan coalition as a member of the Digital Trade Caucus, which is bipartisan, and a leader in that New Democrat Coalition, 96 of us in the Democratic Caucus. I think you will find strong partnership.

Let me shift to an area and region we do not talk as much as I think we should, the freely associated States Micronesia, Palau, others. We are seeing a lot of Chinese incursion into this area that we have obviously had compacts with and a strong partnership between the United States and the freely associated States.

I am very worried about the Chinese influence in this region and, again, want to express to those countries the strong partnership and importance of the U.S. relationship. I'd be curious how State Department is thinking about this region and approaching it.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Yes, I agree with that as well. I had the opportunity to speak to a gathering of those very States just a few weeks ago, virtually.

And in addition, when it comes to the vaccine programs, they are also part of the vaccines that we're—that we're pushing out. And we are looking across the board at places where China is engaged economically, diplomatically, politically, militarily, to include—to include those States.

Mr. BERA. And last, in my last 15 seconds as I look at Myanmar and what's happening in Burma I think there's a strong commitment from the committee and the subcommittee to support the people of Burma. This may be a long-term proposition, and we look forward to working with the Administration and supporting the people of Burma.

Secretary BLINKEN. Appreciate that. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Europe, Energy and the Environment and Cyber, for 5 minutes.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, good to see you again, sir.

Mr. Secretary, when representatives of the Chinese government came to our country in Alaska and disrespected you, they disrespected all of us, and I just wanted you to know, sir, you stand strong against China, we will stand strongly behind you, and this will be something that will unite our country.

So I wanted you to know that you will have Republicans and Democrats strongly supporting you and we know you're going to stand strong against China and their abuses.

Sir, if you look back at the three coronavirus—based pandemics that we faced this century, 2002 SARS1, roughly, 700 people died. The host source bat was found within 4 months.

Fast forward to 2012, MERS. Roughly, 800 people died. We found the host source bat within eight to 9 months.

Fast forward to 2020. COVID-19, 3.5 million lives lost. No indication that we will ever find the source, and I suspect what we will ultimately discover, and we're going to have to do it on our own through circumstantial evidence because we're not going to gain access to anything in China, is that 75 percent of that virus will have been natural, 25 percent will have been genetically modified.

And I'm not going to ask you to answer a hypothetical, sir—I do not like answering them myself—other than to say, I hope to God that there is significant consequences to China should anything come out, and we will stand behind you in a bipartisan fashion. It will unify our country.

Because could you imagine if a virus leaked out from the United States that killed 3.5 million people, cost \$30 trillion of lost economic growth worldwide, permanent psychological and emotional damage to our kids? There would be protests in every street across the planet.

I wanted to shift, sir, though to Nord Stream 2 and give you an opportunity to address that. Our Eastern European friends—Ukraine, Poland, the Baltics, Czech Republic—they are very concerned about this, sir, about the message it sends where we are

opening—doing what America has done, which is essentially lift sanctions and open up Nord Stream 2, allowing Russia to not only transport gas, bypassing that whole region, directly to Germany but, basically, funneling corruption to them as well and really risking our allies in the East.

It's hurt relations with Germany and the United States with these allies. I wanted to give you an opportunity to respond and help us understand that.

Secretary BLINKEN. Great. Thank you. And let me just, first, say how much I appreciate your comments about China and I look forward to working with you on that.

With regard to Nord Stream 2, as you know, construction started in 2018. By the time we took office, the pipeline was over 90 percent physically completed. A couple of weeks ago on May 19th, we actually sanctioned more entities, 13 ships, four companies, that had ever been sanctioned under PISA.

What we also did, though, as you know, under the law was issue a national interest waiver with regard to Nord Stream 2 AG and its CEO. That waiver can be rescinded.

There's a reason that we did that. As a practical matter, the physical completion of the pipeline was, I think, a fait accompli, and irrespective of sanctioning that entity and its CEO, that would not, in our judgment, have changed anything in terms of the physical completion.

So the worst of all worlds is a pipeline that's completed, which we continue to believe is a fundamentally bad idea, a poisoned well with one of our closest partners, Germany, which, whether we like it or not, has invested a tremendous amount in this, wrongly, I think, but they did it. They had a lot of sunk costs.

They were determined to see its completion. So pipeline complete, poisoned well with Germany, and no incentives for Germany to actually work with us to mitigate and correct some of the damage that this is likely to do.

Now Germany has come to the table and we are actively engaged with them to look at what can and should and, I believe, must be done to do some of the things that you've alluded to.

Make sure that the transit fees that Ukraine at some point in the future may lose as a result of this pipeline being able to go around Ukraine, that they—that they are made hold, that the ability of Russia to use gas as a coercive tool or weapon against Ukraine or anyone else is eliminated and there are ways to do that, and that we have agreements in place up front to come back on any activities by Russia that are challenging the security of any of these countries that we will take action against them.

So I think we have an opportunity to make something positive out of a bad hand that we inherited when we took office.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Joaquin Castro, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Development, International Organizations and Global Social Impact, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Secretary Blinken, for joining us again.

Secretary Blinken, over the past several months, the situation in Colombia has seriously deteriorated and I'm very concerned about

the reports of police violence and brutal crackdowns on protesters by the Duque government.

As you know, the United States provides a significant amount of security assistance to Colombia, and I want to ask my question in a historical context, that, for some reason in Latin America, the United States has always found it easy to press and challenge and sanction left-wing leaders, but for some reason has given the kid glove treatment to right-wing leaders over the years.

So I want to ask you, will you consider using our security assistance to Colombia as leverage to stop these human rights violations?

Secretary BLINKEN. When it comes to human rights violations, democratic backsliding, other concerns we have, we make no distinction between left, right, and center. Doesn't matter, and we are going to address the situation as we—as we see it and do what we can to help correct it.

When it comes to Colombia, as you know, Colombia has been, remains a vital partner for the United States. We invested a tremendous amount both diplomatically and in terms of resources way back in dealing with narcotics.

That continues, and then helping to bring peace, including the historic agreement in 2016 with the FARC, and we continue to be invested in trying to make sure that we help Colombia implement that agreement in a meaningful way.

And when it comes to the protests, we have been very concerned about the use of excessive force by the police, other concerns about human rights abuses that have been raised, and we have called upon the government and, in fact, I met with the foreign minister just about a week ago to make sure that the police respect peaceful protest and also that the government investigate and hold accountable any of those engaged in the use of excessive force.

At the same time, what we have seen is the government working to bring together all of the stakeholders in a dialog to try to both understand and then, hopefully, act on the very legitimate concerns and grievances that many of the protesters have brought to the fore, and that process is ongoing and we support it.

Mr. CASTRO. Well, thank you very much for those actions and, of course, our committee will be monitoring the situation closely in Colombia.

I want to ask you about separated families. A few weeks ago, I sent a letter to you and the other co-Chairs of a reunification task force asking you to support my legislation with Senator Blumenthal, the Families Belong Together Act, to ensure these families are given permanent status in the United States.

After my conversations with executive director Michelle Brane, my understanding was that the task force will be looking at different policy recommendations to support these families, and your department told my staff that these families are being reunited under parole authority, which, as you know, is not a long-term fix.

Will you commit to working with me in Congress to find a permanent solution for these families, such as through the Families Belong Together Act?

And just for the committee, these were the kids that were separated from their parents, their mothers, oftentimes, without any way to track them.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Thank you for putting a spotlight on that. Thank you for your engagement on it. And we want to find the most effective and most humane ways to make sure that families come together and are reunited.

So we'll look at whatever tools we have consistent with our—consistent with the law, consistent with our obligations, consistent with, of course, maintaining a secure border, to do that.

And whether it is through the asylum program, whether it's through parole, whether it's through the refugee program, whether it's through various legal pathways, we'll look at—we'll, certainly, look at everything and work with you on that.

As you know, the responsibilities and equities of other departments are front and center on this to include, obviously, DHS, HHS. We're working closely with them. But I also invite you to engage directly with them.

Mr. CASTRO. No, absolutely, and we certainly have and I appreciate that, and would just ask that in the end that all the departments of the Administration work together on a long-term solution as we intend to try to do in Congress.

And then in my last few seconds—I do not have enough time for full question—but I just wanted to bring to your attention we sent a letter on May—some of us sent a letter on May 26th on diversity again at the State Department, and we just ask for your review of it as we'd like to get a response back.

Thank you again, Secretary, for being here again in such a short time. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Tim Burchett of Tennessee for 5 minutes.

We cannot hear you, Representative Burchett.

Mr. BURCHETT. Ah, there we go. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry you missed that. I said some really nice things about you.

[Laughter.]

Mr. BURCHETT. I want to yield some time, if I could, a minute to Representative Maria Salazar from Florida before I get up to speak, Mr. Chairman, if that would be appropriate.

Chairman MEEKS. That is appropriate. The gentleman yields.

Ms. SALAZAR. Yes. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman, and Secretary Blinken, thank you for your time and for being here with us.

I am Maria Salazar from District No. 27 and we have a deeply problem situation in Nicaragua. I commend you for caring about this topic, and I serve hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans exile community in my district.

In Costa Rica, as you know, a few days ago you met with Nicaraguan—you met with Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada and reinforced the importance of free and fair elections this coming November.

I am disgusted, and I am sure you are too, by Daniel Ortega's response to your good advice. Immediately after your conversation,

the Ortega regime arrested two Presidential candidates, Christiana Chamorro and Arturo Cruz.

At this hour, Cruz is in a military jail and Cristiana is under house arrest. Daniel Ortega is following Fidel and Chavez's textbook on how to rig a Presidential election, and as you know, sir, Nicaragua is part of the free trade agreement with this country with the United States, known as the CAFTA-DR.

So I have one question for you, Mr. Secretary. Should this country, the United States, a free country, the beacon of hope and human rights, have a free trade agreement with dictators in this hemisphere who rig elections and jail his political opponents? I would like your answer, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. First of all, I very much share all the concerns that you've expressed and call, as you do, for the immediate release of Ms. Chamorro and her colleagues. And that was outrageous, not—maybe not surprising, but certainly outrageous.

Second, we're going to look at all the tools that we have, economic and otherwise, to try to move Nicaragua on a better path. Unfortunately, to your point, it's moving in exactly the opposite direction.

Ms. SALAZAR. And I—yes, thank you very much for that answer and I certainly would love to followup with this discussion with you and the U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai in order to discuss this topic even more. I think Ortega only understands when the United States speaks loud and clear, and I thank you very much for caring.

I commend you and I continue helping you in this. This is a bipartisan issue. This has nothing to do with parties, and we're here to help you. Thank you very much.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ms. SALAZAR. And now I want to yield back to the gentleman from Tennessee, and I thank you very much for your time.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman reclaims his time.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, sir, for being on here with us.

In a speech, President Xi recently told his subordinates to focus on a trustworthy, lovable—which is kind of laughable—and respectable image for China. Does this mark the end of the Chinese Communist Party's wolf warrior diplomacy and why this sudden change in tactics?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I cannot—I cannot speak for President Xi or what he may have in mind. But here's one possibility. It may well be that China has concluded that soft power is pretty important, too, and the way it is engaging around the world is alienating more people than it is attracting. So this may be a manifestation of that recognition.

Having said that, I do not want to draw any—you know, any clear conclusions from that. I cannot get inside their thinking on this.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. When Secretary Kerry was here with us a few weeks ago, I asked him why his office even existed, given the fact that the State Department already has an entire bureau de-

voted to oceans and international environment and scientific affairs.

He admitted that it was a fair question, and last month, I also sent you a letter regarding Secretary Kerry's role in the Administration. It seems it's very duplicitous. It's in several other departments doing the exact same thing, and I've yet to hear back from y'all.

And so what I was wondering what the necessity is of the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate has.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, appreciate the question and, just quickly, let me say a couple of things. We have been disengaged from international climate efforts for some time, and yet we're at a critical time and a critical year heading to the COP 26 meeting at the end of the year.

And it was very important in the—in the view of president to make sure that the United States was not only reengaged but leading in the effort, not only to do what we need to do here at home but to make sure that other countries were meeting their own responsibilities.

And that requires intensive diplomacy and day in day out sustained engagement at a very senior level, and that's exactly what Secretary Kerry offers.

He's been able to, in the short space of time that he's been there and that we have been in office, to move other countries to raise their ambitions when it comes to what they're going to do to curb emissions.

So we're not the only ones doing the hard work. So that's good for us and it's good for the world. We have had many situations in the past at the department where a particular issue has demanded concentrated, sustained, high-level focus.

We had that when we did the Coalition to Counter ISIS, and we had Special Envoys John Allen and then Brett McGurk working on that. We had that before for Afghanistan and Pakistan when Mr. Holbrooke did the same thing. And I can go back in time, but there are times and places including on climate where having that is vitally important.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hey, I was wondering, Mr. Chairman, if when you introduce me I'm the only who does not have a title. If you could just say something like he's an all-around good guy and one of your favorites. It would help my very fragile ego to sustain a little longer. So thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. We'll work on it.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MEEKS. I now recognize Representative Dina Titus of Nevada for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. I think I'm an all-around good guy, too. So keep that in mind.

[Laughter.]

Ms. TITUS. Nice to see you, Mr. Secretary. I wonder if you could comment just a little bit about the elections yesterday in Peru and Mexico and how they may change the State Department priorities or need for resources.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Look, too soon to tell, especially when it comes to Peru. We do not have a—we do not have a result. It looks like it's too close to—too close to call, and so we need to see what government emerges and what positions they take and how we engage.

But I'm determined that one way or another, we engage Peru effectively. It's an important country that we need to find ways to work with. But let's see what happens.

With Mexico, I think we are more interconnected, intertwined with Mexico than—maybe other than Canada—with any other country in the world for obvious reasons and the relationship is usually important to people on both sides of the border day in, day out, whether it is on economic matters, whether it's on migration, whether it's on security, whether it's on real opportunity.

So we're building and trying to strengthen even further a comprehensive relationship and partnership with Mexico that will be there irrespective of which—you know, which government is in office.

I'm working very closely with my counterpart, the foreign minister. The president has engaged repeatedly with President Lopez Obrador and will continue to do that, because this is too important to the lives of our fellow citizens.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. It will be interesting to see the results. You're right.

Another question I have is during the Obama Administration, the State Department's International Disability Team was very active and engaged, and, of course, like so much of those good programs or many of them, they were lost over the last 4 years.

I just wonder if you have resources or if the president's budget proposal includes the necessary resources to get them reactivated so that we can be a leader again, dealing with individuals with disabilities, be sure they have access to our facilities abroad, and if there's a plan to develop any kind of outreach?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, thank you very much for raising that. I'm determined that we do that both in terms of our own missions in the State Department itself and then, of course, with regard to disability rights around the world.

We are going to have a person who is responsible for that full time at a senior level and that should be, I think, coming forward fairly soon. And I'm going to make sure that we are focused on that both in terms of what we're doing within the department itself, including building a diverse work force, but also making sure that we are engaged in standing up for those rights around the world.

Ms. TITUS. That's wonderful, and I know that community will be very glad to hear you say that.

Just briefly, before I leave, could you talk about what the State Department's doing to encourage international travel? That is such an important part of Nevada's economy and the whole country, both our folks going abroad and people from other countries coming here.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, we've—needless to say, we are very eager to do that, especially as we, hopefully, are moving beyond or starting to move beyond COVID.

That just underscores the fundamental importance of actually moving beyond COVID, what we're doing on getting vaccines out there, working to boost production, trying to end this much earlier than it otherwise would if we left things as they were, and I believe we can do that.

At the same time, we want to make sure that the department has the resources it needs to facilitate and enable travel whether it's for tourism, for business, for students.

We know how much that brings to our own economy. We know how much that does, actually, for our diplomacy, because people traveling back and forth are the best Ambassadors that we have.

Our consular services have taken a huge hit. As you know, it's a money—it's been a moneymaker for the State Department, but with COVID, of course, and travel going to a near standstill, we have not been issuing visas except in essential circumstances and doing that work. The fees that come in have not been there.

So the budget tries to make sure that we're making consular services whole so that they can get back to the business of doing what they do so well, which is to look out for Americans abroad and to facilitate travel to and from the United States.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. I yield back.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Representative Mark Green of Tennessee, who's the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank you and the Ranking Member in holding the committee today and, of course, Mr. Secretary, thank you for testifying. Thanks for giving us three and a half hours.

Before I start, I'd like to remind all the Members of the committee about Journal Club. The first meeting of the bipartisan Journal Club on Foreign Affairs led by myself and my colleague across the aisle, Dean Phillips, will be on the 16th at 5:15 p.m.

Of course, the goal is to go beyond sort of the 5-minutes we get to have in committee and dig deep into a dialog across the aisle about key issues, and we'll just take two Journal articles that are published and you'll get those.

In fact, all the details will be to your schedulers by COB tomorrow. And if you could and if you're coming, let us know and then read the articles before we get there.

Now for my comments. As Congress considers the State Department's appropriations, we have to prioritize a lot of things.

But I'd like to mention three that are really important to my constituents: countering Communist China, reinforcing our ally, Israel, and of course, strengthening alliances in the Western Hemisphere.

First, countering the Chinese Communist Party. The CCP is the greatest threat facing the world. I believe that, and I'll use sort of a dime paradigm—what I call the dime paradigm to describe that diplomatic, informational, military, and economic.

Diplomatically, China has deployed the Belt and Road Initiative to drive a wedge between the United States and developing nations and our allies. They've perfected the art of debt trap diplomacy, taking advantage of struggling countries to bend them to their will.

Informationally, you look no further than COVID-19. Rather than alerting the world about the coronavirus outbreak, the CCP focused on silencing their own doctors, scientists, and journalists who tried to warn us.

Additionally, the CCP cyber attacks on U.S. military personnel information, the F-35, submarine bases, are well known, and China has deployed Western technology to supply on and oppress the Uighurs and have even conducted genocide against them.

Militarily, China has been deploying its forces and building islands in the South China Sea in violation of international court judgments. Just a few weeks ago, the Chinese People's Liberation Army and Navy opened its first overseas base in the Horn of Africa, and lately, we have seen alarming trends in the Chinese State-backed entities looking to gobble up American companies critical to our national security.

Economically, China continues to steal intellectual property from Western nations, especially the U.S. Huawei's theft of Motorola technology, which led to the company's demise, the loss of thousands of U.S. jobs, and billions from the U.S. GDP.

It's a case study in their predatory behavior. The U.S. Trade Representative has estimated that China's IP theft has cost our GDP between \$200 and \$600 billion annually, and of course, China continues to practice currency manipulation and unfair trade behavior.

The second priority must be—that must be reflected in the budget is supporting Israel, our greatest—one of our greatest allies. From my experience fighting the war on terror, I know that the Middle East is fraught with instability, insecurity, and lots of uncertainty.

While we have other solid allies in the Middle East, by far the Nation that aligns with our values the most is Israel. It's a thriving democracy that respects human rights and shares our Western values.

Unfortunately, Israel has once again come under threat. Just last month, Hamas militants reportedly fired over 4,000 rockets deep into Israeli territory. Given the importance of Israel to regional security, we have to ensure that the State Department's budget enhances our diplomatic and security partnership.

Last, strengthening the Western Hemisphere. As Ranking Member of the Western Hemisphere, working side by side with Chairman Sires, it's our job to advocate for strong relationships with Latin America and Caribbean countries. It's a region of significant opportunity that's too often overlooked.

There are weak economies there, areas of human rights violations. Corruption and violence have increased, and the dangerous surge of illegal migration on our southern border is due to push factors in those countries. Over the last few decades, many manufacturing jobs have left Latin America and gone to Communist China.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, up to \$80 billion in annual imports from China to the United States could be replaced by Latin American exports, and that's why I'm drafting near-shoring legislation, to bring those jobs back, working with leaderships of the IDB and DFC.

And, Mr. Secretary, I'd like to let you know that Mr. Zuniga has been very cooperative and we have plans for breakfast soon.

In addition to advancing economic opportunities, we must stand up to oppressive socialist regime regimes in Cuba, Venezuela, and the increasingly authoritarian government in Nicaragua. Human rights are universal and America must support freedom and democracy in the region.

Finally, we must work with our allies to combat corruption, disrupt drug and human trafficking networks, and reduce illegal migration.

Mr. Secretary, just one real quick question. No one's asked you, that I've heard about——

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman is out of time. The gentleman is out of time.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. I now recognize Representative Susan Wild of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. And welcome, Mr. Secretary. So proud and happy to have you here with our committee, and I've been listening to your testimony with great interest.

I want to ask you first, Mr. Secretary, in the year 2020, China, for the first time, surpassed the United States as the European Union's greatest or largest trading partner. And at the same time, the U.S.'s overall trade deficit in 2020 reached its highest point in 12 years.

So I'd like you to address, if you would, from the State Department's perspective the priority for restoring our role with the EU and others in terms of being trading partners and the importance of it for our economic and national security.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I think it's fundamental and central, and we're very, very focused on it.

Two things, very quickly. The president will be going to Europe in just a few days and as part of that he'll be having a very important meeting with the leaders of the European Union, and I know he will focus on these issues.

We just reestablished a dialog with the EU on China, a U.S.-EU dialog on China. I think that's particularly important and timely, and we started that up again.

And I myself have engaged repeatedly, including going very early to the EU to start to work on these issues. Our Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, very focused on this as well.

So is Secretary Raimondo at Commerce, Secretary Yellen, all of the different agencies and departments that have equities, and I think we all agree on the centrality of that economic relationship and the desirability on our—on our part to strengthen it.

Ms. WILD. Well, thank you, and I really do hope that that is a strong priority because I think it's so incredibly important for our position in the world with our—with our allies and adversaries, quite frankly.

My other great interest in addition to trade is human rights, Mr. Secretary, and I know that many of my colleagues will join me in welcoming your strong commitment to a foreign policy that centers human rights concerns at its core.

And I'd like to ask you specifically about human rights concerns as they relate to our relationship with the Philippines.

We know that in March of this year authorities in the Philippines conducted raids that led to brutal deaths of at least nine labor activists and dissidents, only a latest example of a pattern of mass human rights violations under the Duterte regime.

So without going any further, can I just ask, has the Administration taken any substantive actions in response to these specific events and/or talked and conveyed to the—this regime our view of their actions?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. In short, yes, and certainly when it comes to concerns about human rights in the Philippines, we and I, personally, have been directly engaged on this including with my—with my counterpart.

This is very much a part of the conversation and engagement that we have with the Philippines. And as you know, the president has been determined and committed to put human rights at the—at the center of our foreign policy and that's irrespective of where we see these concerns arise, whether it's the Philippines or anywhere else.

Ms. WILD. Well, can I ask you, is this Administration going to review current military assistance to the Philippines?

Secretary BLINKEN. We will make sure whether it's, again, with regard to the Philippines or anywhere else, that we are effectively using whatever tools we have to try to make sure that human rights are being respected, defended, advanced.

We have to make judgments based on the particular situations in specific countries and—but in each case, we'll look to try to make sure that we're doing and making the best judgment possible on how to most effectively advance the defense of human rights.

Ms. WILD. Well, thank you. I look forward to working with you and the Administration on human rights issues, and I do believe that it's important for the United States to leverage its support and assistance to other countries to some extent in, particularly, those countries that have a pattern of human rights abuses.

But thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentlelady yields back. I now recognize Representative Andy Barr of Kentucky for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Secretary Blinken, thank you for responding favorably to my letter to you that was signed by over 60 of my colleagues requesting vaccines for Taiwan.

Recently, the Administration announced 7 million vaccines for Asia, including Taiwan. What is the status of delivery of those vaccines to Taiwan and what more can the United States and our partners do to help the Taiwanese stem the spread of COVID within that island?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Thank you. Thank you for that.

We are moving out as expeditiously as we possibly can getting the vaccines out there, including to Taiwan. I think work is being done on that as we speak, and I think things will start to flow in the—in the coming days and, certainly, in the next couple of weeks.

We're committed to getting the 80 million vaccines allocated by the end of the month, early into July, but the first 25 million should start to move soon.

We want to make sure that we're doing it, obviously, safe—safely, effectively, efficiently, that as you know, the logistics of this are not without complication. But I think you'll see that happening in the—in the days and, certainly, weeks ahead.

Mr. BARR. Well, Secretary, thank you especially for helping the Taiwanese with COVID there. And building off of the topic of strengthening relationships with Taiwan, I assume you're aware Taiwan lifted a ban on certain pork imports from America in the hopes of pursuing a broader trade agreement with the U.S. I believe deepening trade ties with Taiwan is important to countering Chinese malign influence.

Mr. Secretary, what is the Administration's position on a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan?

Secretary BLINKEN. So I'd have to refer you to Katherine Tai, the U.S. Trade Representative. But I know we are engaged in conversations with Taiwan or soon will be on some kind of framework agreement, and those conversations should be—should be starting.

Mr. BARR. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. But I would ask you to talk to the U.S. Trade Representative.

Mr. BARR. Thank you.

On climate diplomacy, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman recently warned the Biden Administration that cooperation on climate change is, quote, "closely linked with bilateral relations as a whole," unquote.

Given China's clearly Stated intention to condition climate negotiations on other issues and the Biden Administration's prioritization of climate, which, according to a recent article in Foreign Affairs magazine, has given the CCP significant leverage to advance Chinese interests in other areas, will you and Envoy Kerry fully commit to rejecting any demands from Beijing to make compromises on economic, technological, security, human rights issues as a means of extracting what I would—what I would say are illusory commitments from China on climate?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Yes.

Mr. BARR. Great. Thank you very much for that.

Let me ask you about the Administration's position on holding the CCP accountable on COVID and COVID origins. I do appreciate the fact that President Biden has ordered an intelligence community inquiry into the origins of COVID-19.

I also, by the way, commend the Administration for expanding on President Trump's order banning U.S. investment in Chinese companies linked to the military.

But I do remain mystified by why the State Department terminated the Pompeo investigation into COVID origins and I remain disappointed by news reports that President Biden has yet to have a conversation with General Secretary Xi regarding China's role in the origins of the pandemic.

There was a recent article—I think it was just over the weekend—in the Wall Street Journal that says that the science suggests a Wuhan lab leak. I commend it to your attention if you haven't

read it. It's a fascinating read, and evidence of a lab escape is mounting.

Do you and the Administration remain open to the possibility that the COVID-19 pandemic was genetically manufactured and intentionally released by the CCP as a bioweapon against the United States and the international community?

Secretary BLINKEN. We remain open to most possible explanations if the evidence is there to support it. The initial inquiry that the president ordered back in March and that reported out some weeks ago concluded that the two most likely scenarios were a natural occurrence and transmission from animal to human and a lab—a lab leak, and I think no one has yet found conclusive dispositive evidence that makes clear which one of those it is, which is why the president—you just referred to this—ordered the intelligence community to do an intensive whole of government 90-day review to see if we can finally come to a determination of what happened, where it happened, why it happened.

Mr. BARR. Well, thank you. And take a look at that article. It's fairly interesting about this case.

Yield back.

Chairman MEEKS. Gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Ted Lieu of California for 5 minutes.

Mr. LIEU. Thank you, Chairman Meeks, and thank you, Secretary Blinken, for your leadership.

At our last hearing, we discussed the issue of assignment restrictions, which is the practice of the State Department to prohibit certain employees from working on issues related to certain countries.

This practice affects a number of current State Department employees as well as, potentially, a number of there are 500 new employees that you seek to hire. We have asked for data on assignment restrictions from the department including a breakdown by categories such as race, gender, and ethnicity. I'm wondering if you have an update as to when we might get that data.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, and I do—I very much appreciate you putting a light on this. This was a concern of mine when I actually served as deputy Secretary back in 2015 to 2017, and in the time since and under our Administration—and I have to credit as well former Deputy Secretary Steve Biegun—the department has focused on this, and we, basically, ordered two reviews be conducted.

There's an assignments restrictions task force that is looking at how to mitigate any security concerns in background investigations, and then diplomatic security itself has been conducting an internal audit on the effectiveness of the restriction process.

We're basically looking at both the broader policy and individual cases, and I am determined that we leverage diversity and the skills of our work force in ways that make the department and our foreign policy more effective.

I think we will be in a position to report out on this in the next few weeks. The work is coming to—coming to a conclusion and we should have more to say and I'll be happy to make sure we're engaged with you on this in the coming weeks.

Mr. LIEU. Thank you very much. And what I would like to ask of you is in addition to looking at making the process better, I want you to consider eliminating the practice in its entirety, and so I'm going to offer you at least three reasons why that should be.

First, I do believe that this practice is offensive and disrespectful. It's, basically, telling a number of State Department employees that we believe you're going to be a traitor, that given a choice between the United States of America and the foreign country in which you've been given an assignment restriction that we believe you are going to pick that foreign country.

The U.S. military does not do this. I previously served in active duty in the United States Air Force. I was granted a top secret security clearance. The Department of Defense didn't then come in and say, hey, we're going to give you an assignment restriction and not let you serve in U.S. Pacific Command because you have family Members that live in Taiwan.

Second reason is, as you have Stated, this does affect recruiting and retention. We know that this policy kneecaps immediately the career of State Department employees. They're simply never going to rise to the highest levels of this department.

I had a meeting last month at an event with former Ambassador of South Korea, Harry Harris, who was appointed by President Trump, and he agreed that this was a deeply problematic practice. As you know, he also happened to have been the first Japanese-American admiral of U.S. Pacific Command.

If the Pentagon early in his career had gone to him and said, hey, you cannot work on issues related to Japan, would he have ever risen to the rank of admiral and commander of U.S. Pacific Command? He would not. But the military does not do that and that's a reason that the U.S. benefited from his expertise and his talent.

And then finally, I just want to note that in the 21st century virtually every country has interests beyond their borders. So it makes little sense to have geographic limitations with assignment restrictions.

Let's say a Russian-American employee is given assignment restriction because she has an aunt that lives in St. Petersburg. And so the State Department then decides to put her in Azerbaijan, while Russia can still leverage that familiar relationship and try to seek U.S.-Azerbaijan communications.

And so I just want to extend this policy to an extreme. It would mean that virtually no State Department employee could be stationed anywhere as long as they have a family member stationed or living in a foreign country.

And I want you to look at, really, the entire conceptual basis to see if it makes any sense in the 21st century. I know the process is ongoing, so thank you for doing that.

And then I'm just going to briefly conclude on subnational diplomacy. This is a practice that's been occurring for decades where mayors, council Members, State Governors use their tremendous talents and energies to engage with foreign governments and foreign cities and foreign organizations.

The State Department, I think, would do well to try to benefit from that expertise and help them coordinate it. I have legislation

with Republican Congressman Joe Wilson. We're working with your department to get it done and I appreciate you taking a look at that as well.

Secretary BLINKEN. First of all, thanks for the very compelling comments on the restriction process. Very much appreciated. And on the subnational piece, yes, we'd really welcome working with you and Congressman Wilson on that.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired. I now recognize Representative Greg Steube of Florida for 5 minutes.

We cannot hear you.

Mr. STEUBE. My apologies. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I signed on to a letter urging President Biden not to rejoin the JCPOA and provide sanctions relief to Iran. This would directly and negatively affect not only our national security but Israel's security as well.

Since President Biden took office, Iran has started enriching uranium at its highest level ever and Israel was under a multi-day assault from Hamas. Hamas is financially and materially backed by Iran.

Lifting sanctions on Iran, a well-known financier of terrorism, is a gift to Hamas, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups that will threaten both Israel and our troops in the region.

I also co-sponsored a bill that would enable any remaining funding appropriated for Gaza assistance to be repurposed for Israel to support the Iron Dome. President Biden even mentioned support for Israel's Iron Dome air defense system, which receives U.S. funding. The system intercepted most of the 3,000 rockets Hamas fired in the recent conflict, keeping Israel's death toll relatively low.

However, President Biden also promised \$110 million to go toward rebuilding Gaza with assistance and funding through the U.N. efforts. Hamas controls Gaza through its security forces and obtains resources from smuggling, informal taxes, and reported external assistance from some Arab sources in Iran.

How do you plan on ensuring that Hamas does not benefit from the \$110 million in U.S. assistance?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I was just, I think as you know, in Israel about a week, 10 days ago, meeting with officials from the government across the board, and I think there is an increased understanding that Hamas has fed off of misery, fed off of a lack of hope, and if that is perpetuated it's, unfortunately, likely to get stronger, despite the fact that it itself has been responsible for bringing much of that misery onto the Palestinian people.

There is an understanding and a commitment, I think, on the part of Israel both to respond to the real humanitarian crisis that exists in Gaza now—water, electricity, sanitation, sewage.

If you look at what is—what is happening, it is, on a human level and our Israeli counterparts agree with us, unacceptable.

So we need to do something about that.

And when it comes to reconstruction, there is both a belief and a commitment, I think, on the part of Israel, the United Nations, Egypt, ourselves, and others, that we can do this in a way that does not result in materials being siphoned off by Hamas to rebuild tunnels or reconstitute more of their rocket forces.

I agree with you, it's very important that we have a mechanism that we are confident in, that the Israelis are confident in, that allows us to do that and that's exactly what we're working on.

Mr. STEUBE. Well, how are you going to do that if—if Hamas controls Gaza how are you going to ensure that American taxpayer dollars are not going to be inadvertently directed to Hamas?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have worked in the past and others have worked in the past, including Israel, with different organizations, institutions, entities to make sure that, first of all, we know exactly what needs to be legitimately rebuilt, and then that the resources are allocated to do just that and nothing more. And we, certainly, look forward to be able to come to Congress as these plans develop with how that would work.

Mr. STEUBE. Yes, I look—I would look forward to us doing oversight on that after the resources are spent.

Mr. Secretary, you would not admit when asked during the conflict that Hamas was getting their arms from Iran. But then after the war ended, the head of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, thanked Iran for the weapons.

The other terrorist organizations in Gaza, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, is a direct proxy of Iran. How can you say you support Israel's security while wanting to enter a deal where Iran is going to get billions in new weapons?

Secretary BLINKEN. Iran's support for Hamas has been a persistent problem for a long time, a problem that existed before the nuclear deal, that continued during the nuclear deal, and continues today, despite the so-called maximum pressure campaign when we're out of the deal, and that's a problem that we have to address.

When I was—when I was asked about this, I needed to make sure that I understood from our own intelligence, from the Israelis, from others, exactly what was—what was going on.

I think Hamas has provided—has been provided by Iran in the past with key components, technical knowledge for the program. The best assessment, public assessment, that we have is that in this most recent incident most of the rockets were indigenously produced in Gaza by Hamas. It is not in any way an excuse for Iran's support for Hamas, including very strong rhetorical support in this most recent incident.

Chairman MEEKS. Gentleman is out of time. Time is expired.

I now recognize Representative Dean Phillips of Minnesota for 5 minutes.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Greetings, Mr. Secretary. Grateful for your service to our country.

Mr. Secretary, do you agree that it's a net benefit to our national security by addressing State fragility proactively by providing assistance and helping reduce political instability and reduce opportunities for nonState actors?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do.

Mr. PHILLIPS. And as you surely know—and by the way, I agree, of course—the FYI 2019 NDAA authorizes the Secretary of Defense to transfer up to \$75 million to other agencies in our government for foreign assistance programs and activities that are necessary for security cooperation.

However, as far as I'm aware, none of those dollars have been released or utilized to date. The Fiscal Year 2020 NDAA also allows for the DOD to support stabilization activities and national security interests of the United States.

Clearly, the president's budget places a strong emphasis on the need to address global fragility. So using the authorities that Congress has already provided, are there ways for DOS and DOD to better collaborate with one another on such important strategies?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I believe there are. I have constant dialog conversation with my friend and colleague, the Secretary of Defense. We're talking about this every single week, and we're all looking, not just Defense and State, but all the departments to look at how we can both better coordinate and leverage the resources that we may have in individual departments to advance common objectives.

And I think Secretary Austin would be the first to agree that State fragility is a real concern for him. I know it's a concern for the president of the United States, and they both know that if we do not address these things up front, then we're likely to have to address them in different more costly ways at the other end.

So we're all focused on this and we want to make sure that, yes, we use the authorities that we have to focus resources where they need focus.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Great. I couldn't have said it better, and grateful for your shared interest.

I want to talk about the world's kids, too. As you're well aware, a surging global youth population around the world is the opportunity for enormous potential, can drive transformation and unleash quite a bit of disruption.

I would say also the effects of COVID-19 has disproportionately affected kids around the world. 1.6 billion students out of school, one in six have stopped working, social political unrest in many nations driven by youth protests spreading around the world.

And yet the global youth population hasn't even peaked yet. It's expected to reach 1.4 billion by 2065. In the poorest nations in the world, youth population is expected to increase by 62 percent by 2050.

So with the largest youth population boom ever and COVID-19 robbing so many kids around the world of education, employment, and engagement opportunities, what is the Department of State's and USAID's strategy to ensure that young people around the world are at the center of our pandemic recovery efforts?

Secretary BLINKEN. That's a really—that's a really great question and an important observation, and I think both with regard to COVID itself and recovery from that, but even more broadly, we have to have this youth population front and center in mind.

Africa is among one compelling and immediate example irrespective of COVID but, of course, exacerbated by COVID. You've got 1.3 billion people on the African continent. The median age is 19, to your point.

That presents both a tremendous opportunity but also, I think, a real—a real challenge, because if this population is left unattended, without opportunity, then that inevitably is going to produce bad results.

Conversely, if we can find ways to help countries maximize the human potential that they have, then I think the possibilities are almost endless.

So we—programmatically across the department, we are looking for ways to make sure that we're engaged with young people and/or engaged with countries and governments to make sure that to the best of our ability they're pursuing policies that address their needs and their concerns.

So I think it's hard to put it in any—in any one place. I mean, I can point to, again, Africa. I can point to what was a wonderful program that we continued, the Young African Leaders Initiative that President Obama created.

But we have those kinds of programs. But this also goes to our economic engagement, our diplomatic engagement, our engagement on technology across the board. But I'd be happy to and would welcome your thoughts on that, going forward.

Mr. PHILLIPS. And I would encourage you to consider a senior level advisor or youth advisor to help in these efforts. I only know I have a couple seconds left.

I just want to make a statement quickly about Ethiopia. We're all aware of our concerns there and the circumstances, and pleased by the fact the president has brought Ambassador Feltman as a special envoy for the Horn of Africa.

I just want to support your efforts to address what is becoming a terrible humanitarian crisis in a country of great importance. Thank you for your service. I yield back.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

Let me just ask the Secretary. I know you're not as old as I am, Mr. Secretary, but I want to offer you a 5-to 10-minute break if you need it.

[Laughter.]

Secretary BLINKEN. I'm happy to power through.

Chairman MEEKS. OK, we'll continue.

So next I will recognize Representative Dan Meuser of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Mr. MEUSER. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate that very much, and my thanks to Ranking Member McCaul, and Mr. Secretary, we all greatly appreciate you being here with us today.

I represent Pennsylvania's Ninth. We are nationally renowned in Pennsylvania's Ninth for many things, including Christmas trees, candy, beer.

Chairman MEEKS. You're muted.

Mr. MEUSER. I hit it by accident. Thank you, Chairman.

But we're also in Pennsylvania's 9th and throughout Pennsylvania renowned for our anthracite coal. Anthracite coal, Mr. Secretary, is very rarely used as a energy product. It is primarily used to serve as the most important raw material for domestic steel production.

So anthracite coal is an almost pure form of carbon. Its low levels of sulfur and other impurities make it the most important raw material in the production of domestic steel.

Today, anthracite is the most efficient and cleanest type of coal for this—for this purpose. A stable domestic anthracite industry is critical to the resiliency of the steel industry.

I'm concerned Russia is attempting to undermine our domestic supply, which creates a national security well as a threat to our economy, but also a threat to our national security that does, in fact, need our attention.

Russia's systematic and exponentially growing dumping of Russian anthracite coal to the United States steel industry directly impacts anthracite production in my district, primarily in our Schuylkill, Northumberland, and Luzern counties.

Pennsylvania anthracite is, again, a key component of U.S. steel production, and because it can be purified before its use it represents, again, a very clean and efficient method.

But these numbers, Mr. Secretary, are actually staggering. Over the last 5 years, Pennsylvania anthracite production has shrunk from approximately 2.27 million tons of anthracite to 1.8 million tons. This reduction is 20 percent—a little over a 20 percent reduction in only 4 years.

Conversely, total sales of Russian anthracite have increased from approximately 6,000 tons in 2016 to approximately 22,000 tons in 2020, which is 12 times higher than our domestic usage.

So 90 percent of the most important raw material in our Nation's steel production comes from Russia.

So, Mr. Secretary—so, Mr. Secretary, I ask you, first, are you aware of the enormous increase in Russian anthracite coal that is being used in our U.S. steel production?

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I have to acknowledge this is—this is news to me, not something I focused on, and I very much appreciate you bringing it to my attention.

Mr. MEUSER. That's great. I appreciate that as well. Are you then aware or is the State Department or can you look into what are—what are strongly considered to be very questionable and, perhaps, illegal dumping of Russian anthracite into the U.S.?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, and what I'd like to do, Congressman, is, first of all, make sure that from your office we have all the information you have.

Second, I will share that or make sure it's shared with my colleagues who have direct responsibility for this, starting with the U.S. Trade Representative and her office as well as other departments like Commerce, and then go from there.

But I'd really welcome getting the information.

Mr. MEUSER. That's great, Secretary. I will get you the information, and it sounds as if you will be willing to work with me and other stakeholders in trying to counter what very well could be illegal dumping and help support the U.S. steel industry.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, Congressman.

Mr. MEUSER. That's terrific. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Representative Ilhan Omar of Minnesota for 5 minutes.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, last time you were here I asked about the Trump sanctions on the ICC staff. So I wanted to thank you publicly for doing the right thing and lifting them.

I know you oppose the court's investigation in both Palestine and in Afghanistan. I haven't seen any evidence in either cases that domestic courts can—both can and will prosecute alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity.

And I would emphasize that in Israel and Palestine this includes crimes committed by both Israeli security forces and Hamas. In Afghanistan it includes crimes committed by the Afghan national government and the Taliban.

So in both of these cases, if domestic courts cannot or will not pursue justice and we oppose the ICC, where do we think the victims of these supposed crimes can go for justice and what justice this mechanism is for?

Secretary BLINKEN. I'm sorry, Congresswoman. I lost you for 1 second there at the end of your question. Could you repeat that, please?

Ms. OMAR. Yes. I said in both of these cases, if domestic courts cannot or will not pursue justice and oppose the ICC, where do we think victims are supposed to go for justice, and what justice mechanisms will you support for them?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. First, let me just say at the outset that it is impossible not to be profoundly moved by not just the loss of life in the recent violence and conflict but especially the children whose lives were lost.

And we all have a tendency to throw statistics and numbers out there. But we are talking about boys and girls, Israelis and Palestinians, as well as men and women, and I think none of us whatever—from whatever perspective we come can lose sight of that. So that's one thing that's very important.

Look, you know our views on the ICC and its jurisdiction. We continue to believe that, absent a Security Council referral or absent the request by the State itself, that that's not appropriate. I continue to believe that whether it is the United States or Israel, both of us have the means and—

Ms. OMAR. Mr. Secretary, I do understand that point. I'm asking what mechanisms do you believe is available to them.

Secretary BLINKEN. I believe that we have, whether it's the United States or Israel, we both have the mechanisms to make sure there's accountability in any situations where there are concerns about use of force and human rights, et cetera.

I believe that both of our democracies have that capacity and we have demonstrated it, and we'll need to continue to demonstrate it, going forward.

Ms. OMAR. And in the case of Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. With regard to Afghanistan, if it's—our objection, as you know, was to the assertion of jurisdiction of the United States in the absence of a Security Council referral, and I believe that we have the means if there are any cases to be brought to adjudicate them and to find justice.

Ms. OMAR. Appreciate that, and sorry about the connection issues. There are now nine detainees at Guantanamo who have been cleared for release. The State Department has a crucial role in—to play in finally closing the prison, which represents such a complete stain on our Nation's morality. I'm wondering if you will

prioritize reestablishing the Office of the Special Envoy for Guantanamo Closure at the State Department or create a similar position.

Secretary BLINKEN. The short answer is yes. We're working actively on these cases, and I want to make sure that the department has what it needs, both in terms of resources and personnel and including someone who can focus on this full time to do that. So we're actively looking into doing that, yes.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentlelady's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Claudia Tenney of New York for 5 minutes.

Ms. TENNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member McCaul, and thank you, Secretary Blinken, for being here for so long. We really appreciate your willingness to sit here, and we know these are tough questions and we're grateful for your leadership.

I just wanted to ask you a little bit about some of the reports that we have seen where there's been alleged that State Department has actively discouraged officials and employees from referring to the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Israeli normalization agreements as the Abraham Accords, despite that being their official name. Do you support the Abraham Accords?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I do.

Ms. TENNEY. Have you heard any of this alleged activity where State Department officials have discouraged the use of the term Abraham Accords?

Secretary BLINKEN. I have not, and it's certainly not coming from me. I'm happy to refer to them as the Abraham Accords. I think they were an important achievement, one that not only do we support, but we'd like to build on.

Ms. TENNEY. Thank you. That's my next question. I just wonder if you could explain a few things that you may have in the works that you could speak about, if possible, on how you're going to build on the Abraham Accords and continuing with the six—you know, with a comprehensive plan building on the success of those accords?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think they are two things, Congresswoman. One is that with regard to the countries that have already engaged in this normalization process with Israel, we want to look to see how we can be helpful in moving things along and supporting those efforts, and that's actively underway. It's come up in a number of conversations that I've had.

And then separate from that, we're looking at countries that may want to join in and take part and begin to normalize their own relations with Israel. That, too, has been very much part of the conversations I've had with several of my counterparts.

Ms. TENNEY. Thank you. I really appreciate that. That's going to be great for us in the future, I'm sure.

One other question just dealing with the Three Seas Initiative, just the regional effort between Central and Eastern Europe to extend cross-border energy, transportation, digital infrastructure, and to help boost economic development.

This initiative will help a lot of our Members diversify away from Russia's energy supply dominance and serve as a powerful counterbalance to the influence of China on the financial investments, dip-

lomatic engagement in the region, including the Belt and Road Initiative.

And thank you for your comments on explaining a little more in depth on Nord Stream 2. I know it's not an easy issue. Is the Biden Administration prepared to robustly support this Three Seas Initiative, and if so, how would you be doing that similar to how the Trump Administration did?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Thank you for flagging that. The short answer is yes, I've had—I had the opportunity to actually speak to countries involved in this. I've, in my own engagements and diplomacy, encouraged their engagement and our own, and as you know well, we have our own tools that I think can strengthen that including the DFC, and so we're very much focused on that and making sure that we're bringing to bear the tools that we have to strengthen it, to advance it.

Ms. TENNEY. Thank you. I really appreciate that. Also, just want to say thank you to you and your team for meeting with us and keeping us abreast, along with Representative Castro, on the situation in Burma. We hope you continue to focus on those so we can find some kind of peace and some kind of resolution to this situation.

Obviously, we have introduced legislation for an arms embargo against China and against Russia in the Security Council. We know that's hopeful, but we hope that you'll continue to support that and the Burmese people in our communities will have some kind of relief and restore democracy there and restore the government that was democratically elected. But we appreciate your efforts and really grateful for your comments today.

And I yield back my time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Representative Colin Allred of Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLRED. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Secretary Blinken, it's great to see you again so soon. I want to thank you for coming before us again, and I'll just mention how impressed I've been with your responses on a wide range of topics.

There's so much going on in the world and so many things I would love to discuss with you. But I wanted to try and drill down on two things, and then perhaps we can find time for the other things another time.

The first is about the direct access program for U.S.-affiliated Iraqis. A constituent of mine, Allen Bach, who bravely served our country and fought in Iraq, wrote to me for assistance with his interpreter, Abdul Salam Muhammad Jamil al-Basri, or Sam for short.

So let me just tell you a little bit about Sam. Sam had applied for refugee resettlement through the direct access program and had been cleared through the process. When President Trump suspended the program in 2017, Sam had to reopen and start over from the beginning with his case, and he has once again made it to the final stage of the process only to find that the program has been suspended again due to an ongoing fraud review.

And although I certainly understand and appreciate the need for a full review into any fraud committed by U.S. officials or anyone else, the suspension was supposed to end in April and it seems as though the suspension has been now extended indefinitely.

With the humanitarian and security concerns, do you have any updates on when this program will be able to continue or when consular operations will resume at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thanks for flagging that because, look, I share your strong commitment to doing right by the people who did right by us. We have to do that. And I am going to go look into the status of this.

I do not—I do not know exactly where it stands. We did have a concern related to fraud. We wanted to make sure that the program is fully secure and not take any chances. So there was a review. I do not know the status, but we'll come back to you on that.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes, I appreciate that and I—you know, I was going to say you need to get back to me on this. I'm happy to work with you on it. You know, I think there's a lot of us who are concerned both with Iraqis and Afghanis who served with us and we're happy to work through anything that the Congress can help you with there.

Turning now to a totally different topic, Mr. Secretary, I want to just quickly discuss the G-7 summit, the upcoming summit, and ask about cooperation among our allies to combat the misinformation campaigns perpetrated by countries like China and Russia that we all have discussed today and at length.

Now, this is something that I've actually been working on with my colleague from across the pond, a member of Parliament named Stephen Morgan who represents Portsmouth, and it's deeply concerning to both of us.

And it was, of course, great to see the development of the rapid response mechanism that found that misinformation is one of the key tactics used to undermine democracies in the West and around the world.

These campaigns also have negative effects on vaccination rates, as you know, and have led to extremist violence, and I want to see if you could speak to what work the U.S. is doing with our allies to disrupt these misinformation campaigns both at home and abroad and whether or not that's something that will be discussed at the G-7.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. The short answer is yes, and again, I really appreciate you flagging that. There was a preparatory meeting of the foreign ministers for the G-7 that I took part in a few weeks ago in advance of the president going, and this was very much on the agenda. It'll be on the agenda for the leaders.

I'm very proud of the fact that the Global Engagement Center here at the State Department is the premier platform now for sharing information, including among our G-7 partners, on misinformation of one kind or another. When we see it we're able to share it, and to your point, and I know you've been focused and leading on this, having in place this rapid response mechanism is really important to be able to turn that information about misinformation into a practical way of countering it.

And so we're—the department, the Global Engagement Center very focused on this, and yes, it will be on the agenda for the president in a few days.

Mr. ALLRED. Well, great. I just want to say I appreciate the leadership that you and President Biden have shown in not only protecting American democracy but trying to be a beacon, as we always have been, for democracy around the world.

Of course, as a former voting rights attorney, I can say that the best medicine for us and our foreign policy is to get our own house in order, and I'm working on that as well.

But thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being with us. I'll yield back my final 30 seconds and say congratulations on nearly getting through this hearing with us. We appreciate it.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Representative August Pfluger of Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. PFLUGER. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Ranking member, thanks for holding this, and, Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here. I appreciate the conversations we have had about my constituent, Trevor Reed. It's, obviously, very important that we bring him back home to Texas.

Just in the past couple of weeks, he was diagnosed with COVID, reportedly tried to get medical care and help from the prison that he is unlawfully being held in, and was refused that service until several days afterwards.

So in the upcoming—and thank you for your efforts publicly to bring him home, among others—will President Biden be bringing this up with his counterpart, Mr. Putin, in the upcoming summit?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. PFLUGER. I appreciate that. Anything that you can do publicly to continue to apply pressure is very important.

Moving to the next topic, I'm very concerned—continued concern, and a lot of my colleagues have talked about the Nord Stream 2 and the project there.

Just a few days ago, Vladimir Putin threatened that the Ukraine must show good will if it wants Russian gas transit. This underscores what we have been saying about the pipeline the whole time, that Putin will exploit the Nord Stream 2 pipeline as a coercive tool to render the Ukraine more vulnerable to Russian influence and aggression.

And given the Ukraine president's comment yesterday he basically said, how many Ukrainian lives does this relationship have to cost us. It sounds like Kiev feels somewhat abandoned, and I want to also say that the Baltic States—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, among others—feel the same way.

So when it comes to some of the—some of the insurers and other folks that we previously had as sanctionable, what is the Administration going to do at this point in time to give our allies, especially our Baltic allies and those on the front lines the reassurance that we're with them?

Secretary BLINKEN. I appreciate those comments very much. A couple things on that.

First, I think President Biden was going to be speaking with President Zelinsky today. That may already have happened. But that was on the books.

As you know, I think in Ukraine about a month ago, I strongly reiterated our commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to defend Ukraine against aggression in all forms coming from Russia to include using energy as a—as a tool of coercion, and we're determined to do that.

We had a conversation a little bit earlier about Nord Stream 2 and the reality that the pipeline began construction 2018. It was more than 90 percent complete by the time we took office, and as a practical matter, preventing its physical completion, in our judgment, was at that point not likely to happen, irrespective of sanctions.

We did sanction more entities under PISA than had ever been sanctioned before just a couple of weeks ago. But we waived, and the waiver can be revoked, sanctions on the—on Nord Stream 2 AG, the corporate entity behind it, and the CEO.

But as said to our partners in Germany, that they now need to work with us and work with others to make sure that any of the potentially bad consequences from this pipeline going into operation are mitigated and averted and that means making sure that Ukraine is made whole for any transit fees that in the future it may lose as a result of the pipeline going around Ukraine, that Russia cannot use energy as a coercive tool against Ukraine or anyone else in the region, and to put in place various mechanisms to do that.

So we're actively engaged with Germany on that. The outcome that we wanted to avoid was pipeline complete, poisoned relationship with Germany because of sanctions, and no prospect for actually doing something practical and concrete to help protect Ukraine and the others.

So we all share the same objectives, and we're working to get there.

Mr. PFLUGER. Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

And I've said this many times, especially because the district that I represent includes the Permian Basin, but energy security is national security and there's not a single Ambassador that I talked to that are on the front lines with Russia that do not wake up every single day thinking about how they're going to provide energy and how they're going to ensure that they're not dependent on malign actors around the world.

They're very fearful and concerned that Russia is going to hold them hostage through coercive and malign activity, and I would just ask the Administration and urge the Administration strongly to continue to give our allies, especially those in that geographic position, the utmost confidence that we're with them and that we continue to hold their security in the utmost of importance.

And with that, I yield back. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Andy Levin of Michigan for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hi, Mr. Secretary. Good to see you. Thanks for your service and sticking with us today.

On May 24th, the managing editor of the news outlet Frontier Myanmar, Danny Fenster, was arrested at Yangon International Airport where he was heading home to visit his family in Huntington Woods, Michigan, in my district.

He has been transferred to Insein Prison, which, according to CNN, is one of the country's most notorious political prisoner prisons known for its deplorable conditions.

Journalists like Danny put their lives on the line because they believe in truth telling. His case hits home because it's about our fundamental values on democracy and good government, and it literally hits home for me because Danny and his brother, Brian, went to my high school. They're Berkeley Bears. His loved ones and his many supporters are in pain and I just cannot rest until he arrives home safely.

My staff and I have been on the phone with your department staff, embassy officials, and Danny's family every day doing everything we can to draw attention to his case and make sure his immediate and unconditional release remains a top priority.

I want to thank you, the State Department, and especially our Ambassador in Burma, Tom Vajda, for your hard work. I'm truly grateful for that.

Nevertheless, Danny remains in prison with no charges and no consular access. We need him freed immediately and unconditionally.

Mr. Secretary, I need to ask you to redouble your efforts. What can you do more and what can we do in Congress to support the State Department's efforts to bring Danny home?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I appreciate everything you've said. We share the deep concern for Daniel Fenster. We have another American citizen journalist, Nathan Vaughn, who is also being detained—arbitrarily detained. We have had access to him. We have not had access to Daniel Fenster.

That's a violation of, among other things, the Vienna Convention. We are pressing this in every way that we can. We have very limited, if any, contact with the military regime, but certainly through others. We're pressing this as best we can and we will—we will continue to do so.

I think we have—other countries also have detained citizens in Myanmar. Deep concern there as well. And we are all working together as well to try to get our people home.

And it's, as you point out, even extremely egregious in the case of journalists who are doing their jobs on behalf of all of us.

So all I can tell you—all we can commit to is the doubling down on our efforts to do this. I wish I had a—you know, a sort of silver bullet answer here except to say we are very focused on this, very engaged. We want to get them out, get them home.

Mr. LEVIN. Great. Well, we're here to help you in any way.

Let me ask you about Haiti. As you know, an OAS delegation is visiting Haiti this week, and while I certainly welcome all efforts to bring about a Haitian-led solution to the current political and constitutional crisis, I'm concerned by reports that the delegation

does not plan to discuss the constitutional referendum plan for June 27th.

This referendum is widely considered, almost universally considered, illegal, and any discussion that sidesteps it cannot produce workable solutions. In addition, I'm worried that our Administration is focused on pressing for elections at any cost, even though elections held under the auspices of the de facto President Moïse's regime would not be free or fair.

Instead, we should be tackling the corruption, the violence, the impunity, and other conditions fueling this crisis, and pushing back on this planned referendum forcefully.

What is the Administration doing to make clear that this illegal referendum should not take place?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, thank you. And our position is, indeed, that it should not. That is the position of our government. We're making that position known. I believe we're part of the OAS delegation that is in Haiti or is about to be in Haiti, and—

Mr. LEVIN. So you believe the OAS delegation will raise this? Because we have heard they're not even going to raise it, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, let me come back to you on that because I'm not sure. All I can tell you is our own policy, which would be reflected in anything that we say or do, is to oppose the referendum for the reasons you cite.

We're supportive of other pre-election activities. We still think there's a possibility and an opportunity if the appropriate steps are put in place to have an election. But the referendum we oppose for the reasons that you cited.

Meanwhile, we are trying to provide additional assistance, including to the—to the police to more effectively do their jobs and deal with the profoundly, profoundly troubling insecurity that exists in Haiti.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. I now recognize Representative Nicole Malliotakis of New York, who's the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on International Development, International Organizations, and Global Corporate Social Impact, for 5 minutes.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Just reading my title took half my time away. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your time today.

As you know, we give hundreds of millions of dollars to the World Health Organization. We are actually paid for about a quarter of the assessed fees more than any other nation, and I'm concerned about their transparency, their accuracy, and their willingness to truly investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, the report that they had issued recently had said that the laboratory leak was the least likely hypothesis, and certainly this was something that where the Communist Chinese Party had a lot of influence in putting together this report.

I'd like to know what are you doing, working with our international partners to demand accountability and transparency on the origins of this virus, and what can we do as Members of the World Health Organization to demand that they work with us to provide these answers to the American public?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I share your share your concerns. First, it was important for us to reengage with the World Health Organization in order to actually be in the room and at the table to advance reform and to help deal with the deficits that are manifest in the organization.

In our absence, others fill the void and others may have no interest in actually seeing the World Health Organization become effective and have the tools it needs to deal both with this pandemic and future pandemics.

So we're now actively engaged in doing that. And to your point, the first report that was issued, the so-called Phase One report, was not meant to be the final answer. We strongly support moving forward with the Phase Two report, which the WHO is committed to doing, although the PRC is resisting that.

And, as we have said on many occasions, we have deep concerns about the methodology used on Phase One to include the inappropriate role that officials from China apparently played in that report.

In parallel, though, to pushing with other countries to move forward with Phase Two, we have, as I think we talked about a little bit earlier, the president has ordered the intelligence community and the whole of government to dig into everything we know and can find about the origins of the virus, and he's given us 90 days to do that.

We had an initial study that was done at his instruction back in March that concluded that there were two likely ways by which this happened. One was natural occurrence and transmission from animal to human. The other was a leak from the lab.

But the report did not—could not conclusively say it was one or the other. What we want to do now is see if we can make a better determination with some more certainty.

So that's what we're working on. We're working both on the WHO track to make sure that they are doing what they need to do, and we're doing what we need to do.

Last thing I'd mention, very quickly, is that it's so important, going forward, that, one, we get an understanding of the origins, that we get accountability, but, vitally, that we get change, and by that I mean the responsibility of countries in real time to share information, to give access to international experts, to have transparency—everything that was absent in this case, and that is not acceptable, going forward, and the WHO needs to be, among other things, in the lead on insisting on those norms and making sure that they're implemented.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Thank you. One other question I have is many Americans have expressed to me I, myself, was unhappy with this decision, and I wanted to know if this is a change in policy of yours and the Administration to fly flags of organizations—political organizations—at our embassies.

I believe that it should be the United States flag only that flies above our embassies, with the exception of another government flag or military flag. But I would like to just know from you if this is a change in policy and we're going to expect this, going forward.

You know, political organization should not have their flags flying above our embassies and that is something that I believe

strongly and I believe many of my colleagues also believe, and I believe most Americans believe that as well.

And so I would just ask that you reconsider this because I think it is really setting a bad precedent, going forward, in how we represent our Nation and on foreign lands.

Secretary BLINKEN. I appreciate that and I understand the perspective. We have given chiefs of mission the authority and discretion to make these decisions, and I think that, in fact, it actually puts our best foot forward, especially in countries that do not allow different groups, constituents, citizens, to express themselves freely.

We do, and I think that's actually a very important thing for the United States to do, and I believe that most Americans would support that as well. It's at the essence of our democracy.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentlelady's time has expired.

I now recognize Representative Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. I just want to confirm that you all can hear me OK.

Chairman MEEKS. Yes, we hear you.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Secretary Blinken, for joining us.

I want to kind of circle back to something that happened a little earlier in the conversation and affirm that the State Department has verified time and time again that the UNFPA does not support China's harmful coercive family planning policies, and I'm really, really pleased that the Administration has requested now record levels of funding for this critical program, the UNFPA.

Fifty-six million has been requested in this budget and that's the highest level that's ever been requested by a U.S. Administration.

It has been a little while since that's been the case that we have been funding the UNFPA. So my first question is, how do you envision working with the UNFPA to support its core work as well as the important assistance of girls and women in humanitarian settings? In short, how will we be able to reinvigorate our commitment to the UNFPA, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, we're—I think we're just getting started, and as you pointed out, we have made taking these steps to resume the funding consistent with the law, and I think that's very important.

And what I'd be happy to do is make sure that our teams link up both to get your own thinking and ideas about how we can most effectively engage and also to share our own.

Ms. HOULAHAN. I would very much welcome that opportunity. I'm very enthusiastic about the purpose and mission of the UNFPA and very grateful that we are once again reclaiming that important responsibility that we have to the globe.

Similarly, unfortunately, that while I am happy to see the Administration is reengaging with UNFPA after quite a lot of years of absence, unfortunately, it looks as though the UK is doing the exact opposite. The current UNFPA's biggest donor is now making severe cuts to its own assistance programs.

So if I could, sir, I was wondering if I could ask for you to engage with other donors at your upcoming June 30th Generation Equality

Forum in Paris to coordinate a funding response to fill that gap that will be created by these cuts by the United Kingdom. Is that something that I can ask for you to do?

Secretary BLINKEN. Happy to take that up.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

And then in my final couple of minutes, I'm really also passionate about global learning and learning loss, particularly over the last 15 or so months with the pandemic.

Ninety percent of our world's learners have been impacted by COVID-19-related school closures, and history definitely teaches us that the longer that students are out of school, the less likely it will be that they can return.

And so as the lead sponsor of the Global Learning Loss Assessment Act, I would love—I very much believe that the U.S. foreign assistance should address long-standing inequities that are exacerbated by this pandemic, especially access to education and especially for girls.

I am concerned that the budget requests that you all put forward does not include sufficient funding for education and would result in the United States scaling back our support for children and youth at the very time when we most need to be stepping up.

So if you would not mind, sir, speaking to how our foreign assistance can help students and education systems recover from the pandemic, and improve the delivery of quality education, especially for girls, and other marginalized children in need.

Secretary BLINKEN. First of all, I very much share your concern. We had a preexisting concern, obviously, about the fundamental importance of education and gaps that we see around the world, and that concern has been dramatically exacerbated by COVID-19, and of course, we have experienced that ourselves. But we know that it's even—the impact is even worse and much greater in many other countries.

I'm happy to look at this and would welcome getting any information or ideas that you have. I believe that in a variety of ways and through very different—and different programs we are adequately resourced to advance this mission. In some cases, there are, as a result of technology, greater efficiencies that we can bring where we can actually do more with less. So in some cases, that's the case.

Having said that, I'd welcome looking at anything you have, your office has, and we can take a closer look at that.

Ms. HOULAHAN. You have gotten three for three. I really appreciate all of your feedback to me and all of your commitments to me. I will look forward to our teams connecting so that we can move forward on all of us.

And with that, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Representative Pete Meijer of Michigan for 5 minutes.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin my question, I would like to yield 1 minute to Representative Young Kim of California.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman yields.

Ms. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. There. Thank you, Congressman Meijer. Secretary Blinken, it's good to see you again. I want to quickly touch on the recently announced international vaccine distribution plan. While this is a welcome start to reasserting U.S. leadership on global health, 25 million doses are not nearly enough to compete with the vaccine diplomacy of China and Russia.

So I would hope and expect the Administration to send even more doses abroad soon and update this committee regularly on expected time lines for delivery and to which countries.

So let me now move on to an issue from your last visit to this committee where you assured me that President Biden was interested in appointing a special envoy on North Korean human rights issues.

That was 3 months ago, and human rights issues in North Korea have still not been substantially addressed by this Administration. So can you now provide a time line for when President Biden plans on appointing a special envoy on North Korea human rights as required under the North Korean Human Rights Act?

Secretary BLINKEN. Two things. First of all, let me answer your second question first.

We will be coming forward with that. I cannot put a time line on it. We're determined to do that. I think, as you know, the vetting process has become ever more complicated, ever more time consuming, ever more laborious. We want to make sure that all of that is done properly.

But we will do that, and if I—as soon as I have a better sense of timing, I'm happy to share that with you and your office. But we're committed to doing that.

And second, with regard to COVID, it's not just these 25 million. It's 80 million vaccines between now and early July. We will have shared more vaccines by a factor of five than any other country on Earth, including China. And it does not stop there.

There will be excess vaccines going forward beyond July, and as I noted, we're also working very hard on increasing capacity to manufacture vaccines so that there's a much greater supply and that we can be the leader in getting the world vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Ms. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you very much. I'd like to yield back the balance of my time.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman reclaims—the gentleman reclaims his time.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul, and Secretary Blinken for joining us here today.

I just want to reemphasize what several of my colleagues and what the Ranking Member said about the Special Immigrant Visa Program for especially our Afghan interpreters who served with and under the United States military during our conflict.

As that conflict comes to a close, Mr. Secretary, I know you mentioned that we will continue some of the processing ability even after the troop withdrawal. But I would like to continue to emphasize the need to explore options in a third country or in Guam, as was done with Operation New Life in 1975 under President Ford's Administration at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Within a

matter of weeks, over 100,000 folks were able to get settled, processed, and prepared.

I know we have spoken with DHS on the vetting side, and that chief of mission approval does seem to be the major backlog. So we are fully here to support what we can do to make sure we are doing right by our allies.

And I also wanted to emphasize what my colleague, Mr. Levin from Michigan, said about Danny Fenster, the Michigan journalist who was arrested by the Tatmadaw on May 24th. I know you've already spoken to those efforts.

I just wanted to, again, emphasize our need to make sure that American citizens who are being held in custody overseas, especially those in an evolving conflict as in Myanmar, are being taken care of and that we're doing everything we can to get and secure their safety.

I have a large Burmese population in my district. I've spoken with them on multiple occasions. I was heartened to see that Chevron and Total have suspended some dividend payments to the MOGE pipeline and the Yadana field.

But I just wanted to ask, Mr. Secretary, has the State Department had additional conversations or work with our ASEAN allies and others to locate and freeze Tatmadaw assets located offshore, such as in Thailand and Singapore?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. First of all, I appreciate all of your comments very much and agree with you.

Second, yes, we're looking at various ways to—both to make sure that the military regime does not enjoy the benefit of assets that allow it to keep going. For example, we're encouraging countries that are invested in enterprises that directly support the military regime to reconsider those investments, and we're in close conversation with many countries, ASEAN Members, focused on Burma.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Please let us know of any additional assistance we can provide. We do not want to see Myanmar become a failed State with ethnic armed groups throughout the region looking to exploit that security situation with them.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. The gentleman yields back, the time allotted for questions has now expired. I want to thank the Secretary for giving us three and a half hours. I know that there's one or two other Members that were waiting for questions.

I apologize to you. I know how awkward it is to be on the bottom row. I've been there. I was there for a while. But the Secretary has given a tremendous amount of his time, and so I thank—I just wanted to ask the Ranking Member McCaul and thank him for his cooperation in putting this hearing together.

Do you have any quick closing additional comments before we close?

Mr. MCCAUL. No, just thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Secretary, for your three and a half hours. I know you're a busy man.

And I just want to conclude with if there's anything Congress can do to help you, again, with these Afghans who were so loyal to our

troops and put themselves in harm's way that when they're put in harm's way we protect them from the Taliban.

I think the worst thing I could think of would be if the Taliban took over and slaughtered them.

And also, force protection at the embassy is very important as well, and I've had several briefings on that and I know you're acutely aware of that as well.

So if there's anything that we can do, I think this is an issue the Chairman and I are in agreement on and as with most issues we are, and we thank you for your time today, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaul. I really appreciate all of this time with the Members. I especially appreciate the, I think, very good, important conversations we have had about so many different issues and I really appreciate the spirit in which we're having those conversations.

I apologize to colleagues who didn't get a chance. I have obligations to another committee in the House in just a short while. But I'm happy offline to try to speak to folks who didn't get a chance to get questions in today and followup that way.

So, again, thank you.

Chairman MEEKS. Let me thank you for that, Mr. Secretary, because it's been a short time since you last testified before this committee and your work has taken you, among other places, from Tokyo to Brussels to Kabul to Reykjavik, and most recently back to our own hemisphere in San Jose.

So we know that your schedule is jam packed and itinerary is proof positive of the urgent challenges that U.S. foreign policy must address from nonproliferation to conflict resolution, from migration to climate change, from rebuilding democracy-based alliances to countering malign or corrupt actors.

So in your first appearance before this committee in March, you laid it out at a high level for foreign policy and matters of priority that you're going to measure.

But this budget request puts the Administration's money where its mouth is, and I look forward to continuing to engage with you and the Administration as we move forward with the activity identified by Fiscal Year 2022 and the budget request, including on our priorities I and the other Members have.

I'd like to, again, thank Ranking Member McCaul for his partnership and working in a bipartisan way on this committee.

Good luck with your next committee hearings, and thank you for appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in such a short period of time. We look forward to the next time.

As of now, the committee is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:36 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY), Chair

June 7, 2021

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held virtually via Cisco WebEx. The meeting is available via live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Monday, June 7, 2021

TIME: 10:00 a.m., EDT

SUBJECT: The State Department's Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request

WITNESS: The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chair

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Monday Date 06/07/2021 Room Cisco WebEx

Starting Time 10:02 a.m. Ending Time 1:37 p.m.

Recesses 0 (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Gregory W. Meeks

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

The State Department's Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

SFR - Connolly

QFR - Meeks, Wilson, Cicilline, Kinzinger, Castro, Fitzpatrick, Omar, Burchett, Levin, Steube, Jacobs, Jackson, Costa, Schneider

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 1:37 p.m.


Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
X	Brad Sherman, CA
X	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
X	Karen Bass, CA
X	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
X	Ami Bera, CA
X	Joaquin Castro, TX
X	Dina Titus, NV
X	Ted Lieu, CA
X	Susan Wild, PA
X	Dean Phillips, MN
X	Ilhan Omar, MN
X	Colin Allred, TX
X	Andy Levin, MI
X	Abigail Spanberger, VA
X	Chrissy Houlahan, PA
X	Tom Malinowski, NJ
X	Andy Kim, NJ
X	Sara Jacobs, CA
X	Kathy Manning, NC
X	Jim Costa, CA
	Juan Vargas, CA
	Vicente Gonzalez, TX
X	Brad Schneider, IL

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Michael T. McCaul, TX
X	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
X	Steve Chabot, OH
X	Joe Wilson, SC
	Scott Perry, PA
X	Darrell Issa, CA
	Adam Kinzinger, IL
X	Lee Zeldin, NY
X	Ann Wagner, MO
X	Brian J. Mast, FL
X	Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA
X	Ken Buck, CO
X	Tim Burchett, TN
X	Mark Green, TN
X	Andy Barr, KY
X	Greg Steube, FL
X	Dan Meuser, PA
X	Claudia Tenney, NY
X	August Pfluger, TX
X	Nicole Malliotakis, NY
X	Peter Meijer, MI
X	Ronny Jackson, TX
X	Young Kim, CA
X	Maria Elvira Salazar, FL

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Statement for the Record from Representative Gerald E. Connolly
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

President Biden’s inauguration marked a moment of profound relief for the majority of Americans and the international community. The previous administration forced the United States into a unilateral global retreat. Under former President Trump, America went from being a defender of democracy and human rights to a country that turned a blind eye to malign dictators and closed its borders to people in their most desperate hours of need. The world’s confidence in the United States was damaged immeasurably by our withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, Paris climate accords, and refusal to make an ironclad commitment to our Article 5 responsibilities to our NATO Allies. We must put that sad chapter of American history behind us and attempt to undo the immense damage wrought by the previous administration. The wreckage of the last four years, however, will not be cleared overnight. We can start to build back better by enacting a foreign operations budget that recommits to our allies, actively promotes the protection of democracy and human rights around the world, and embraces multilateral engagement to meet and combat global challenges, including global health security and the rise of China.

I have long been a strong supporter of increased human rights protections and am increasingly alarmed at the targeting of dissidents and opposition leaders, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Since 2017, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman has had absolute control of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s security and intelligence organizations, and according to U.S. intelligence reports, approved the operation in Istanbul, Turkey to capture and kill Washington Post journalist, and my constituent, Jamal Khashoggi. The previous administration did everything they could to shield Crown Prince bin Salman from accountability, which is why I introduced the Protection of Saudi Dissidents Act. This legislation, which passed out of the House on April 21, 2021 on an overwhelming, bipartisan basis, would end that impunity and prevent American arms exports to Saudi Arabia for as long as they continue to engage in the intimidation and killing of dissidents. Legislation like this, along with a stated commitment to prioritizing human rights, is the only way authoritarian regimes like the one in Saudi Arabia will ever change their ways.

The FY22 Presidential Budget Requests demonstrates how critical it is that we work to strengthen global health security. The last year and a half showed us how small the world truly is, and how critical it is that we work with other countries when faced with a global pandemic. In March, Secretary Blinken said, “we need to make sure we learn the right lessons and make the right investments in global health security, including tools to predict, prevent, and stop pandemics and a firm global commitment to share accurate and timely information, so that a crisis like [COVID-19] never happens again.” I could not agree more, and that is why I introduced the bipartisan Global Health Security Act (H.R. 391) with my colleague Rep. Steve Chabot, which recognizes the critical role of U.S. leadership in international health security, enshrines U.S. global health security policy in statute, and ensures that there is a permanent designated official responsible for coordinating these efforts and accountable for response outcomes. I led a letter based on this legislation, asking President Biden to allocate \$2 billion in funding for a new Global Health Security Fund, and was disappointed that the FY22 Budget Request did not meet this level, but will continue to push for increased funding.

Climate change is another critical issue that is now receiving the attention it deserves under the Biden Administration. Not only is it threatening dozens of United States military bases, it also poses an existential threat to millions of people and will be the likely driver of conflict as it gets progressively worse and people must compete for resources. In one of his first official acts as President, Biden signed an executive order rejoining the Paris climate accord that has now been signed by every other nation on Earth. The budget request builds on that action and asks for \$2.5 billion for international climate programs, including \$1.2 billion for the Green Climate Fund, which would be the first American contribution to this U.N.-run fund since 2017.

We currently face an alarming global rise in authoritarianism and extremism that must not be ignored. According to Freedom House's Nations in Transit 2020 report, "there are fewer democracies in the region today than at any point since the annual report was launched in 1995." Russia continues to illegally occupy Crimea, use aggressive tactics against Georgia, maintain an unprovoked and unjustified military escalation along the border with Ukraine, and use violent force to silence dissident voices. China is working diligently to establish themselves as a military superpower and is using their technological prowess to conduct cyberattacks and repress their own citizens. We need to take a forceful stand against this type of behavior. As the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, my top priority is establishing a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO. This Center will serve to acknowledge that NATO is not just another military bloc – it is a coalition of nations committed to shared democratic values. As the United States recommits to NATO, I urge President Biden to advance his ambitious pro-democracy agenda by supporting the creation of this Center.

Finally, this budget request understands the importance of reestablishing the United States as a global leader in foreign humanitarian assistance. President Trump proposed 20% cuts to the foreign aid budget every year he was in office. He also completely suspended our contributions to UNWRA, leaving some of the world's most vulnerable populations at even greater risk. The FY22 budget request reverses this horrifying trend, requesting \$10 billion in humanitarian assistance and restarting our assistance to UNWRA, which is especially critical following the recent conflict in Israel. It also reopens our doors to those seeking safety, providing funding to admit 125,000 refugees. I firmly believe this number should be our floor, not our ceiling, as outlined in my legislation, the Lady Liberty Act of 2021 (H.R. 977), but it is a welcome step in the right direction.

President Biden and Secretary Blinken have their work cut out for them in attempting to repair our global standing and restore our ties with allies and international organizations. President Trump's foreign policy doctrine was rooted in the abandonment of American values, the dissolution of multilateral agreements and partnerships, and the neglect of diplomacy and development as our first lines of defense. I am eager to offer what assistance I can in reinvigorating U.S. global leadership and engagement.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**Questions for the Record from Chairman Gregory W. Meeks
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
June 7, 2021**

Question:

“What is the disaggregated diversity demographic data for the schedule B and C appointees, including Senate-confirmed senior officials, onboarded from January 20, 2021 through June 7, 2021? In terms of disaggregated data, please provide each appointee’s race, ethnicity, and gender broken down by title and the GS-level.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Under 29 CFR 1614.601, 3 FAM 1580, and privacy laws, the Department is only authorized to provide protected employee demographic data in the form of gross statistics at a level that preserves employee anonymity. The aggregated demographics of the eight Senate-confirmed appointees and the 63 Schedule B and Schedule C appointees include: 60.6% Female, 78.9% White, 11.3% African American, 7.0% Asian, 1.4% Multi-race, 1.4% Native Hawaiian, and 2.8% Hispanic. The above demographics capture appointees who onboarded between January 20, 2021 and May 31, 2021. June data will not be available until early-to-mid July.

Question:

“Do you intend to appoint a senior official who is specifically charged with negotiating detainee transfers and managing Guantanamo closure policy on behalf of the State Department?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The NSC is leading a thorough interagency review process to advance the President’s stated goal of responsibly closing the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility (Guantanamo). This review includes an assessment of current Guantanamo policy, including how leadership of the closure effort can best be configured going forward. Together with our interagency partners, the Department of State and our Bureau of Counterterrorism are actively working to carry forward Guantanamo efforts as quickly as possible to affect the repatriation or transfer of detainees deemed eligible, an effort that has seen progress as we continue to negotiate with suitable countries.

Question:

“Did Department officials play any role in securing Pompeo’s housing arrangements on the military base.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Former Secretary Pompeo requested Department of Defense (DoD) consideration to lease a residence as a civilian and was responsible for entering into his residential lease as a civilian occupant in accordance with DoD standards, terms, and conditions.

Question:

“What was the Department’s financial obligation to DOD in support of Pompeo’s housing on base, if any such obligation was waived by DoD, what was the amount subject to that waiver?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: In the interest of national security, the Department of State entered into a separate agreement with DoD to establish a Protective Detail Command Post within the premises of former Secretary Pompeo’s residence. The Department ensured a clear delineation between the Secretary’s personal lease and the Protective Detail Command Post space agreement and agreed to pay for required security upgrades to the space and to reimburse DoD for all related operations and maintenance costs via an Inter-Agency Agreement (IAA) (Economy Act) at a rate of \$4,762.32 annually. Co-locating the Command Post maximized operational efficiencies.

Question:

“What goods, services, rights, etc. were received by the State Department as part of this arrangement? Did DS agents reside or occupy a component of the residence at Ft. Myer?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: In the interest of national security, the Department of State entered into a separate a Inter-Agency Agreement (IAA) with DoD to establish a Protective Detail Command Post within the former Secretary’s residence. The IAA reimbursed DoD for services including all utilities (gas, electric, phone, cable, etc.) at the Command Post. The Department of State funded necessary security improvements to the premises and terminated the IAA upon the Secretary’s resignation. Diplomatic Security agents had continuous unimpeded access to the Command Post.

Questions for the Record from Representative Joe Wilson
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“During the hearing you noted Iran’s technical support for Hamas terrorists’ rocket program and rhetorical support for the most recent attacks on Gaza. Please provide the State Department’s assessment regarding the full range of activities – whether funding, training, provision of military supplies, or any other form of support – that Iran has provided to Hamas.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Iran continues its decades-long materiel and rhetorical support for Palestinian militants, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Israeli officials announced in May that Hamas used rockets with a range of between 25 and 60 miles based on an Iranian design. Hamas leaders credit Iran with the initial development of its rocket production but insist that most of their rockets are now locally produced in Gaza, due in part to technical training for Hamas engineers in Iran and by the Iranians. These same leaders admit Iran continues to provide advanced materials to Hamas and PIJ and heavily fund both organizations. Israeli experts assessed Iranian support for Palestinian militants now includes Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

Question:

“How are our Department of State contractors (security, airlift support, base operations support, fuel, etc.) supporting the diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan being brought into the planning and implementation process for this massive demobilization? They represent a significant and critical part to the Total Force and must be involved in this coordination process.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Department of State contractors are fully engaged with DoD on multiple issues connected with the retrograde, focusing on assisting with embassy security as well as supporting those functions that the embassy will perform after the retrograde is complete. The Department will continue to ensure full coordination with all contractors supporting our diplomatic efforts.

Question:

“What is the situation regarding non-DoD personnel and contractors – in particular for the Department of State, USAID, and for the Intelligence Community? We hear from our contacts on the ground there that all U.S. agencies in Afghanistan are directed (by their client/government agencies) to leave before September 11.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The United States is committed to maintaining a robust diplomatic presence in Kabul through the U.S. embassy. All non-DOD U.S. Government (USG) agencies currently in Afghanistan operating under chief of mission authority will remain. Agencies have consolidated, or are in the process of consolidating, their presence onto the embassy compound, or USG facilities at North Hamid Karzai International Airport, which could impact their numbers.

Question:

“What contingency planning is ongoing regarding the future of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan if the country falls back into civil war or under Taliban control? If a U.S. embassy presence becomes unviable?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Both the Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have been developing scenario-based contingency plans to adjust U.S. assistance programming as the operating environment warrants. The U.S. plans to continue its assistance as long as there is a permissible security environment. The provision of U.S. assistance in areas under Taliban control is subject to the issuance of an Office of Foreign Asset Controls license. In the event that the U.S. embassy presence becomes unviable, the Department and USAID may look to multilateral partners such as the United Nations and World Bank to implement programming or continuing program implementation from a third country as needed and as appropriate.

Questions for the Record from Representative David Cicilline
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“What measures are the State Department and related agencies taking to bring about a two-state solution in Israel?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Administration has been clear that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve equal measures of freedom, security, and prosperity, which are important in their own right and as a means to advance toward a negotiated two-state solution. Further, the Administration is strongly encouraging both the Israelis and Palestinians to avoid unilateral actions including settlement activity, annexation, and demolitions, as well as incitement to violence and providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism. We also need to avert possible flashpoints, rebuild, and address the causes that led to the recent crisis.

Question:

“How impactful has U.S. involvement in promoting strong, professional security operations in the West Bank in preventing the region from outbreaks of violence similar to those seen in Gaza?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: U.S. security assistance is critical in building the capabilities necessary to maintain stability in the West Bank and improve the Palestinian Authority security forces (PASF). The Department recently restarted work in conjunction with the U.S. Security Coordinator to develop a program for the PASF, transitioning from individual skills training to collective and operational tasks.

Question:

“Has the State Department and/or related agencies looked further into the reports that Azerbaijan deployed Turkish-recruited mercenaries during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh? If so, what are the findings of that investigation?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The role played by third parties, including Turkey, in the fall 2020 fighting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh was deeply unhelpful and exacerbated regional tensions. The Department is aware of reports that foreign mercenaries participated in the conflict and urged all third parties not to deploy such forces to the area. The Department continues to urge Turkey to

use its strong relationship with Azerbaijan to encourage Azerbaijan to negotiate a long-term political settlement to the conflict as soon as possible

Question:

“What support has Turkey – in conjunction with support emanating from Palestine – provided Azerbaijan in the context of the invasion of Artsakh?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Turkey is a leading supplier of weaponry to Azerbaijan, along with Russia, Israel, and other countries. The Turkish military provided significant material and advisory support to Azerbaijan prior to and during the 2020 fighting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, and Turkish officials offered support for Azerbaijan in public statements. The role in the conflict played by third parties, including Turkey, was deeply unhelpful and exacerbated regional tensions. The Administration encourages Turkey, as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, to support the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan and to help the sides work towards a sustainable, long-term political solution to the conflict.

Question:

“Do you believe the FY22 State Department budget is sufficient in meeting the challenges of a world wrought with increased global fragility?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Yes. The \$58.5 billion FY 2022 Budget Request demonstrates the importance the Administration places on diplomacy, development, and multilateralism, and it positions the Department to help deliver security and prosperity for the American people. The Request meets the climate emergency head-on, strengthens global health, and enables us to defend and advance our democratic values, counter malign activity by our adversaries, and protect the rules-based order we helped to build, including by fully funding our commitments to international organizations. The Request reinforces U.S. humanitarian leadership through \$10.1 billion (\$530 million above FY 2021) for Humanitarian Assistance to respond to growing humanitarian needs in the face of protracted conflicts, natural disasters, and the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Question:

“How does the State Department plan to implement the Global Fragility Act (GFA) and does the Department need any resources to immediately and successfully implement it?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Pursuant to the Global Fragility Act, the Department of State led interagency efforts to draft and adopt the December 2020 U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. The Department is working with the NSC and interagency partners to conclude the

selection of at least five priority countries or sub-regions for implementation of the strategy. Successful implementation of this strategy will require fundamental changes in the U.S. government's approach to stability and conflict prevention, including strong local partnerships, 10-year plans, and tighter integration among bureaus, agencies, the field, and Washington to achieve successful policy outcomes. The FY 2022 request of \$125 million for the Prevention and Stabilization Fund and \$60 million for the Complex Crisis Fund are critical to support priority needs identified in country planning, strategic monitoring, evaluation, and learning, as well as to address wider conflict prevention and stabilization priorities.

Question:

"Beyond GFA pilots, which regions and countries of the world do you foresee the Department dedicating the most resources and attention to in the next year and beyond – will some of those resources be dedicated to issues like conflict prevention?"

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: In the near term, the Department will focus foreign assistance on efforts to combat the global pandemic and its impact on increasing state stability. The Administration is prioritizing the fight against global climate change and democratic backsliding, which are force multipliers for conflict. Regional efforts will be determined by the following priorities, among others: addressing intercommunal conflicts stemming from scarce resources and weak government structures, addressing risk factors that could lead to destabilizing violence and mitigating the spread of violent extremism. The Department's priorities are based on hard lessons learned, which have demonstrated the importance of prioritizing prevention of new conflicts and resolving complex armed conflicts that threaten regional stability.

Question:

"Does the FY22 budget enable the Department to utilize resources to move personnel away from the "no-risk" strategy often employed by diplomats and toward processes that allow relationship-building between civil society organizations and Department staff in countries around the world?"

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The FY 2022 Budget Request supports President Biden's bold agenda for strengthening America's place in the world through development and diplomacy and constitutes the largest staffing increase in State/USAID history. This historic increase will allow the Department to strengthen efforts to reinforce relationships with civil society organizations around the world. The State Department's mission to protect Americans and advance U.S. interests requires our diplomats to operate around the world in a variety of security environments. We continue to prioritize people-to-people engagement and relationships while taking into account a wide range of threats. The Department recognizes that the advancement of foreign policy inherently involves diverse types of risk and that taking calculated risks can be essential to advancing American interests.

Question:

“What are the benefits to the American taxpayer by dedicating some of the State Department’s budget to conflict resolution and mitigation?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The benefits to dedicating Department of State budgetary resources to conflict resolution and mitigation include reducing violent conflict that undermines global stability and economic prosperity, which in turn supports the democracy that is essential to freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, conflict cost the global economy more than \$14.5 trillion in 2019 alone – the equivalent of 10.6 percent of gross world product. In addition, the Department of State’s work on conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution reduces the ability of terrorist organizations and other malign actors to use conflict zones to recruit, hide out, and plot against Americans; reduces the flow of refugees and migrants trying to enter the United States; prevents or reduces major humanitarian crises requiring international responses, for which the United States is often the largest donor; and prevents disruptions in economic supply chains and price increases for American businesses, among many other benefits.

Question:

“Does the Department have the resources it needs to adequately fund atrocity prevention programs?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department uses a wide variety of foreign assistance programs to prevent, mitigate, and respond to atrocities. With additional resources, the Department could expand programs to improve early warning of atrocities. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs receive, respectively \$2.5 million in Economic Support Funds and \$2.5 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement to support programs across the complete continuum of prevention, including efforts to engage youth; to promote justice, reconciliation, and violence prevention; and to strengthen justice sector capacity to recognize and respond to atrocities and monitor law enforcement abuses globally. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor also receives \$500,000 for atrocity prevention training. The Office of Global Criminal Justice supports programming linked to the Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018 to promote evidence collation and accountability.

Question:

“What initiatives is the Department pursuing to invest in climate change mitigation efforts in developing nations and how do these initiatives help prepare those nations and our own for the impacts of climate change?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department, including the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, regularly communicates with the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to jointly support the President’s Climate Strategy. Exchanging technology, know-how, and expertise – particularly through DFC investing tools such as equity, debt, and political risk insurance and on technology like reliable zero-emissions baseload power – are key to advancing emissions reductions around the world. Moreover, by 2024, the United States intends to double its annual public climate financing to developing countries relative to funding levels in the second half of the Obama Administration.

Question:

“Is the State Department considering enhanced or modified investments in civil society organizations in nations susceptible to democratic backsliding?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Biden-Harris Administration has placed promoting and defending democracy at the center of U.S. foreign policy. This includes addressing democratic backsliding. I will use all diplomatic tools, including our investments in civil society organizations, to advance these efforts. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) is the lead for democracy and human rights programming in the Department of State. The Administration increased DRL’s budget in the recently submitted FY 2022 Congressional Budget Justification to ensure that DRL has the resources necessary to continue to invest in and empower civil society organizations.

Question:

“Is the Department planning to increase funding to youth-led initiatives in nations susceptible to democratic backsliding?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Biden-Harris Administration has placed promoting and defending democracy at the center of U.S. foreign policy. This includes addressing democratic backsliding. I will use all diplomatic tools, including supporting youth-led initiatives, to advance these efforts. The Administration increased the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL)’s budget in the recently submitted FY 2022 Congressional Budget Justification to ensure that DRL has the resources necessary to continue to fund youth-led initiatives. Additionally, the

Department undertakes significant public diplomacy programming with youth around the world, including ongoing programming on democracy, entrepreneurship, and other U.S. foreign policy priorities to the hundreds of thousands of members of youth networks such as the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. The Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy prioritizes continued support for these youth networks, as well as other youth outreach programs.

Questions for the Record from Representative Adam Kinzinger
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“As Ranking Member McCaul and others have clearly shown, there is clear concern with the administration’s hasty withdraw from Afghanistan without a plan in place to protect those Afghans who helped in the Global War on Terror. When Congress created the SIV program for Afghans in 2009, it envisioned that the State Department would take affirmative action to protect SIV applicants if they faced imminent danger while awaiting the processing of their visas. Specifically, the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 states that “The Secretary of State [...] shall make a reasonable effort to provide an [SIV] protection or to immediately remove such alien from Afghanistan, if [...] such alien is in imminent danger.” Clearly the administration not only has the authority, but also a responsibility, to protect our allies. **What steps have you taken, or will you take, to provide our Afghan allies protection from the imminent danger posed by our impending withdrawal? How will the administration protect our allies in the event that the embassy in Kabul is forced to close or substantially reduce staffing? Are you considering allowing remote Chief of Mission processing outside Afghanistan, such as in nearby embassies?”**

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department of State takes seriously its commitment to assist Afghans at risk due to their prior service to the United States. In conjunction with interagency partners, the Department is participating in a robust NSC-led effort to streamline Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) processing and leverage all available options to assist Afghans under threat due to their association with the United States. Afghan SIV applicants can have their case transferred to any immigrant visa processing post worldwide upon request. Additionally, there is no requirement for Afghans to be physically present in Afghanistan while their Chief of Mission (COM) application is being considered, and all COM processing is completed by U.S.-based Department of State staff.

Question:

“I was pleased to co-lead HR 3344, the bipartisan Transatlantic Telecommunications Security Act to provide our NATO allies and partners national security financing to counter Chinese and malign influence in the digital sector. **What is the State Department doing to increase the resilience of digital networks in Central and Eastern Europe, and does the Department recognize the need for U.S. national security financing to counter inflows of corrosive capital in this region?”**

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Biden-Harris Administration takes the telecommunications security of our allies and partners seriously, and we are actively working to increase the resilience of digital networks and counter authoritarian influence in Central and Eastern Europe. The Department's Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP) is a global, whole-of-government initiative that promotes an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure internet, and it is active in the region. We encourage foreign governments to use only trusted vendors in their telecommunications systems; in June, I signed an MOU on secure 4G and 5G networks with Albanian PM Edi Rama. We would welcome additional support from Congress in advancing these priorities.

Question:

"In the 116th Congress, I co-led H.Res. 672, which passed unanimously, to endorse the Three Seas Initiative and the Administration's \$1 billion pledge to the Three Seas Fund. I am concerned the current Administration has yet to realize this commitment to our key NATO allies and partners, which only increases uncertainty in the face of Chinese malign influence and Russian aggression in the region. **What is the State Department doing to advocate in the interagency to ensure the U.S. fulfills its pledge to invest in the Three Seas Fund?**"

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Biden-Harris Administration strongly supports the Three Seas Initiative, and I reaffirmed this support during a Three Seas Initiative ministers' coordination meeting in February 2021. The Department of State is in regular contact with the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) regarding its investments in support of the Three Seas Initiative. The Department of State is collaborating closely with the DFC on this issue. DFC continues its negotiations with the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund manager, London-based private equity firm Amber Infrastructure Group, to find a way to invest in the Fund consistent with U.S. legal and regulatory requirements, so the Administration can announce an investment at the July 8-9 Three Seas Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Question:

"As we wind down military operations in Afghanistan, I remain gravely concerned about the many gains we have made in Afghanistan, especially in the realm of women's education. The American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) has contributed profoundly to the advancement of Afghan women in business, civil society, and government. AUAF - a small, but important investment - represents one of the best expressions of U.S. support for Afghanistan. America's investment helps over one thousand undergraduate and graduate alumni from every province in Afghanistan, along with more than 20,000 additional professional development program participants. AUAF is largely considered a legacy institution by Afghans and Americans alike and serves as a symbol of American's commitment to Afghans. This is why Congress has directed the administration in the past three appropriations bills (FY19, FY20 and FY21) to provide robust long-term assistance in the form of an endowment to secure this important investment. What are your plans to ensure AUAF has our long-term support so that the Afghan

women and men who study there are protected as we wind down military operations in Afghanistan?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I anticipate that the Department will carry on its support for AUAF as promoting higher education in Afghanistan, especially for women and girls, is critical for achieving our goals of promoting Afghan self-reliance and stability. The Department recently approved one year of bridge funding for AUAF to ensure its operations can continue. While our support for AUAF remains intact as the U.S. military draws down, we will continue to expect progress on fiscal and operational reforms on behalf of AUAF. The Department will continue to work with USAID to establish a higher education endowment for Afghanistan, as required by our appropriation.

Questions for the Record from Representative Joaquin Castro
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

According to the budget proposal, \$27.6 million has been marked for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. However, only \$3 million is for the new Chief Diversity and Inclusion Office and covers only basic operating costs. How will State fund any programmatic costs for this office and why are they not included in the CDIO’s budget? Would the new CDIO have any oversight or input into how the rest of the DEI funds are spent?

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I am committed to supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) at the Department, relying on our new Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO) to oversee and broaden these efforts across the Department. The CDIO’s initial budget focused on standing up an office to support taking the Department’s already underway DEIA work to the next level. The Bureau of Global Talent Management and the Foreign Service Institute play critical roles in supporting DEIA, and a portion of their budgets will be targeted for that purpose. In coordination with both offices, as well as others in the Department, the CDIO will approve all DEIA-related budget allocations and program plans to ensure maximum impact.

Question:

“Related to the DEI budget, Congress has been concerned about the State Department’s lack of ability to provide demographic data. This is crucial for Congress to track whether the increase in DEI program funds are achieving the intended result. With regard to the \$15.5 million allocated to the Center for Analytics, will this funding ensure the State Department can provide disaggregated demographic data in terms of personnel recruitment, retention, assignments, and promotions? Will the State Department be able to share this data with Congress and if so, when can Congress expect to receive these reports?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Center for Analytics is partnering with the Bureau for Global Talent Management and the Offices of Diversity and Inclusion, Civil Rights, and the Legal Adviser to improve the transparency and accessibility of our demographic data so that we can achieve the diversity, equity, and inclusion goals that will be outlined in our forthcoming five-year Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, consistent with applicable law and the EEOC’s regulatory requirements. I am committed to making as much of this information available to Congress as possible.

Question:

“One of the issues Congress has been following is the State Department’s accessibility programs for disabled employees. One of the common challenges we’ve heard about is the lack of ADA-compliant facilities overseas. In terms of the Embassy Security, Construction, and Maintenance budget, would any of these funds go toward making our overseas embassy and consulate buildings ADA compliant? Does the State Department track which facilities are non-ADA compliant and what is State doing to bring more buildings into compliance?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I appreciate Congress’ interest in our accessibility programs for disabled employees. The new embassy construction projects and leased consulate replacements funded in FY 2022 will result in fully accessible facilities that abide by the federal accessible design standards under the Architectural Barriers Act. In addition, the Department’s Barrier-Free Accessibility Program will undertake minor construction and improvement projects that will address accessibility deficiencies. The Department tracks progress towards improving compliance through a barrier-free accessibility survey, the latest of which identified 75 percent of embassy office buildings as fully or substantially accessible.

Question:

“Over the past few years, the ratio of funding within Diplomatic Programs for the State Department, specifically Ongoing Operations funding (includes core diplomatic capability) and Worldwide Security Protection (WSP) funding, has tightened. Per the Congressional Budget Justification – in FY20 (enduring and OCO funding), \$5,101,045,000 went toward Ongoing Operations and \$4,095,899,000 went toward WSP. Similarly, in FY21 (enduring and OCO funding), \$5,135,714,000 went toward Ongoing Operations and \$4,120,899,000 went toward WSP. Even with calls to eliminate OCO funding in FY22, the President’s Budget requests \$5,414,773,000 for Ongoing Operations and \$4,075,899,000 for WSP. Thus, core diplomatic capability funding has only been about 57 percent of the State Department’s Diplomatic Programs total. Why has State continued to budget for large increases to WSP OCO funding during the Iraq/Afghanistan conflicts without commensurate, or even significant, increases to Ongoing Operations.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Our FY 2022 budget request reflects a clear departure from the previous Administration’s FY 2020 and FY 2021 budgets, which proposed to cut both Ongoing Operations and Worldwide Security Protection (WSP). Congress rejected those drastic cuts and provided additional resources for Ongoing Operations through the FY 2020 Supplementals and FY 2021 ARPA. The FY 2022 budget actually requests a larger increase in ‘new’ funding for Ongoing Operations (+\$279 million, +5.4%) than WSP. The FY 2021 WSP appropriation of \$4.1 billion was partially offset by -\$360 million rescission, and our FY 2022 WSP request maintains a \$4.1 billion level. No OCO funds are requested in FY 2022 for either Ongoing Operations or WSP.

Question:

“Despite some progress in the past several years, corruption remains a serious issue in Central America. To make matters worse, Guatemala and Honduras have gotten rid of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH). These international mechanisms were incredibly important in the fight against corruption in the region. The Biden Administration has expressed interest in advocating for the creation of similar international bodies that can carry on the fight against impunity. What role will the State Department play in advocating for reforms and pushing for new commissions to fight corruption in Central America?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I am committed to working with host country governments in northern Central America to reduce corruption, fight against impunity, defend human rights, and improve good governance in order to help build trust in government and reduce irregular migration. I support the creation of new anticorruption commissions in northern Central America, as well as strengthening and preserving independent anticorruption institutions that uphold the rule of law and supporting the protection of independent anticorruption advocates who promote accountability for corrupt actors in the region.

Question:

“In recent years Mexico has become a destination for many migrants and refugees from across the world. However, the Mexican government has struggled to process and support these migrants. The Biden Administration has shared their intent to work alongside their Mexican counterparts to manage migration together. How will the State Department support Mexico to strengthen their immigration system to have greater capacity and adherence to rule of law?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: We coordinate with our Mexican counterparts on collaborative and humane ways to increase capacity to manage migration, improve access to protection, and strengthen the rule of law. In FY 2021, we are providing nearly \$54 million in humanitarian assistance through international organization partners in Mexico, including support for Mexico’s efforts to implement a 2020 legislative change forbidding migratory detention of children. Our partners also support Mexico’s refugee agency, which has nearly tripled annual processing capacity since 2018. U.S. foreign assistance also supports professionalization of Mexico’s immigration agency. I look forward to strengthening our collaboration through a cabinet-level security dialogue.

Questions for the Record from Representative Brian Fitzpatrick
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“Support for education must remain as a key part of the U.S. approach to international development. Education is a force multiplier in the pursuit of sustainable development outcomes and bolsters broader U.S. Government efforts to promote economic growth and stability, reduce poverty, improve health, and strengthen democracy. It is concerning that the FY2022 budget request would scale back U.S. support for international education funding as our partner countries attempt to recover from COVID-19 and the largest disruption to education in modern history. What steps will the administration take to ensure that the United States sustains support for access to quality education for children and youth in low- and middle-income countries in this time of great need?

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: As the largest bilateral donor to basic education in the world, the USG is uniquely positioned to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic quickly and efficiently, building on the strong foundation set by the *USG Strategy on International Basic Education*. The Administration’s FY 2022 Request of \$888.6 million for basic and higher education is the highest President’s Budget Request for education since FY 2012.¹ Despite numerous challenges in the education sector, the USG reached over 25.5 million learners through international basic education programs designed to improve measurable learning outcomes and expand access to high-quality education for all in FY 2020. In response to the pandemic, the USG is working with partner countries to mitigate the loss of instructional time, prepare for heightened uncertainty, and equip education actors and institutions to be increasingly resilient.

Question:

“As we wind down military operations in Afghanistan, I remain gravely concerned about the many gains we have made in Afghanistan, especially in the realm of women’s education. The American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) has contributed profoundly to the advancement of Afghan women in business, civil society, and government. AUAF - a small, but important investment - represents one of the best expressions of U.S. support for Afghanistan. America’s investment helps over one thousand undergraduate and graduate alumni from every province in Afghanistan, along with more than 20,000 additional professional development program participants. AUAF is largely considered a legacy institution by Afghans and Americans alike and serves as a symbol of American’s commitment to Afghans. This is why Congress has directed the administration in the past three appropriations bills (FY19, FY20 and FY21) to provide robust long-term assistance in the form of an endowment to secure this important investment. **What are your plans to ensure AUAF has our long-term support so that the Afghan women and men who study there are protected as we wind down military operations in Afghanistan?”**

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I anticipate that the Department will carry on its support for the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) as promoting higher education in Afghanistan, especially for women and girls, is critical for achieving our goals of promoting Afghan self-reliance and stability. The Department recently approved one year of bridge funding for AUAF to ensure its operations can continue. While our support for AUAF remains intact as the U.S. military draws down, we will continue to expect progress on fiscal and operational reforms by AUAF. The Department will continue to work with USAID to establish a higher education endowment for Afghanistan, as required by our appropriation.

Questions for the Record from Representative Ilhan Omar
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“Ethiopia: Is the State Department conducting a formal analysis of the atrocity crimes in Ethiopia?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department is reviewing available information relevant for a determination as to whether atrocity crimes have been committed in Ethiopia’s Tigray region. We expect to complete that process soon.

Question:

“When can we expect a formal determination on crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, or genocide?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department is reviewing information relevant for a determination as to whether atrocity crimes have been committed, and we expect to complete that process soon.

Question:

“What transitional justice options are on the table for the United States?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Transitional justice in Ethiopia should address grievances, hold those most responsible for human rights abuses and violations accountable, acknowledge harms, restore property to lawful owners, guarantee non-recurrence, and facilitate country-wide reconciliation. The United States stands ready to support and provide technical assistance to such efforts. It is the primary responsibility of the Government of Ethiopia to create a transitional justice strategy through an inclusive and transparent consultative process that includes the victims’ and communities’ input. The needs of victims should drive decisions about specific mechanisms, and we urge the Government of Ethiopia to undertake such a process.

Question:

“Are we considering supporting a hybrid court or a Security Council referral to the ICC?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Transitional justice efforts in Ethiopia should be driven by a number of factors, including the needs and desires of victims and the willingness and ability of the Government of Ethiopia to pursue domestic accountability. The ICC is a court of last resort. In the immediate term, we continue to press for a cessation of hostilities. We will also continue to consult with domestic stakeholders and international partners to consider all possible avenues for justice for victims, and we urge the Government of Ethiopia to take steps towards comprehensive transitional justice measures to ensure accountability, address grievances and victims' needs, acknowledge harms, and contribute to country-wide reconciliation.

Question:

“Then-candidate Biden said there would be no more blank checks for Egyptian President Sisi. But this year's budget request has the same \$1.3 billion in military aid that we send every year. **What makes this not a blank check? Will the Administration support human rights conditions on this money?**”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Budget Request for FY 2022 reflects the Administration's intent to use Foreign Military Financing to support key U.S. national security interests in Egypt, including counterterrorism, border security, and maritime security. At the same time, the President has underscored the importance of a constructive dialogue on human rights in Egypt as we pursue these interests. We will continue to consult with Congress about our shared interest in improving human rights in Egypt.

Question:

“Both the Foreign Assistance Act and the Arms Export Control Act prohibit arms sales and military aid to countries with patterns of gross human rights violations. Hasn't Egypt violated those terms under Sisi?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Administration shares your concerns about human rights in Egypt. All security assistance and arms sales to Egypt are provided consistent with applicable legal requirements. The Department regularly engages the Government of Egypt on its human rights issues.

Question:

“Central America: I was very pleased to see USAID announce it was re-directing funds from the Government of El Salvador to civil society. I think that’s exactly the right approach. Will the State Department follow suit? And might this be a sign of things to come with Guatemala and Honduras as well?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I am considering all available tools to help support democratic institutions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, including redirecting funds to civil society organizations where appropriate. We are simultaneously working with government actors, the private sector, and civil society to support the people of northern Central America so they can build safe and prosperous countries with independent and transparent institutions in order to create a brighter future for all.

Question:

“We’re now on our second coup in Mali in two years. How can we look at the situation in the Sahel and say our security partnerships have increased stability?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: U.S. security assistance provides valuable tools to assist our security partners in degrading violent extremist organizations and reforming their security sectors, including military intelligence capabilities, trained and equipped security forces capable of conducting counterterrorism operations, more effective logistics systems, professional military education, and more capable law enforcement and justice sector institutions. U.S. and international support have been vital to disrupting and countering security threats across the region. More broadly, we are working with partner governments to help address the root causes of instability, focusing on strengthening good governance, human rights, rule of law, and economic opportunities. These collective efforts will require sustained investment and engagement over the long term to tangibly and sustainably improve stability.

Question:

“I had the honor of meeting Iman Saleh and her sister Muna a few months ago. They were on hunger strike demanding an end to the blockade of Hudaydah port in Yemen. I think we’ve been sending the Saudis mixed signals. I understand that the Houthis have also been playing a counterproductive role, but the fact is our leverage is with the Saudi-led coalition. That’s where we can have more impact. **Isn’t there more leverage we can be using to convince the Saudis to let fuel through the port and airport? Can’t we put arms sales and security aid on the table?**”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Biden Administration has recalibrated our relationship with Saudi Arabia, including indefinitely suspending two arms sales, as we reinvigorate our diplomacy to end the conflict. Food and other essential commercial goods continue to move through Hudaydah and neighboring ports at normal rates, including humanitarian assistance. The Administration continues to engage at the highest levels with counterparts in Yemeni and Saudi governments to ensure that fuel, as well as humanitarian aid and essential commodities, enters the port without unnecessary restrictions.

Question:

“China – Uyghurs: You’ve said publicly that you believe the situation with the Uyghurs is a genocide. This committee has marked up a resolution agreeing with you. But a genocide determination needs to be a legal process, not a political one. When can we expect to see a legal determination on genocide from the Department?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: My predecessor and I have determined that genocide and crimes against humanity have occurred, and are ongoing, against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. Historically, whether to make such an atrocity determination has been a policy decision of the Secretary of State. While atrocity determinations are informed by applying the law to the facts, they are not legal determinations as such. The Department leaves it to judicial bodies to determine the individual criminal responsibility of perpetrators of atrocity crimes.

Questions for the Record from Representative Tim Burchett
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“What is the status of contributions for multilateral vaccine development and capacity as directed in ARPA – specifically what is the status of USAID funding for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)? What is the planned contribution level?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: As part of its Global Health Security program, USAID partners with CEPI to accelerate the development of vaccines against high-consequence zoonotic viruses and emerging infectious diseases with the potential to cause pandemics or epidemics, and to facilitate equitable access to these vaccines during outbreaks. USAID recognizes the key role CEPI is serving in multilateral efforts to defeat COVID-19, including its support to COVID-19 vaccine development under the COVAX pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator. The Administration is finalizing its programming of the ARP funding and once completed, USAID will be happy to share additional information.

Question:

“The President’s Budget Request included \$300 million of funding for the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, or ACT-A, of which CEPI is a part. Why was CEPI not specifically mentioned or identified in this case?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: As outlined in National Security Memorandum-1, the Administration is committed to combatting COVID-19 and assisting countries in preparing for, preventing, detecting, and responding to future infectious disease threats. The FY 2022 request includes \$10 billion for global health programs, of which nearly \$1 billion will be used to address the COVID-19 response and advance global health security. This amount includes \$300 million that could be made available for U.S. contributions to multilateral initiatives leading the global COVID-19 response like the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), of which CEPI is a participating partner.

Question:

“Other donors have provided CEPI with approximately \$1.5 billion in COVID funding in order to advance CEPI’s critical work to develop adaptations and new vaccines to address COVID variants and to advance manufacturing capacity and tech transfers that increase global access to the vaccines. What funding contribution will USAID make to CEPI to support its vital COVID work?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: On September 30, 2020, USAID made an initial award to support CEPI’s vital vaccine development programs against certain high-consequence diseases, and intends to provide funding over a five-year period of up to \$20 million, subject to the availability of funds. USAID recognizes the key role CEPI is serving in multilateral efforts to accelerate vaccine development to enhance pandemic preparedness and defeat COVID-19, including by supporting COVID-19 vaccine research and development under COVAX. The Administration is currently determining how best to allocate funding across various vaccine activities and will keep Congress apprised of these efforts.

Questions for the Record from Representative Andy Levin
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“As you know, last year, the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act was signed into law. It provides \$250 million to expand people-to-people programming, fund Palestinian businesses and entrepreneurs to boost the Palestinian economy, and more. I’m concerned that the law has not yet been implemented, especially at this moment when relationship building between Israeli and Palestinian communities feels so vital. What updates can you share about plans to implement this law in the near future?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I fully support the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA). The Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Development Finance Corporation are currently developing plans for implementing and advancing the goals of MEPPA. I am committed to ensuring MEPPA remains a vital tool of advancing U.S. foreign policy and supporting Israeli and Palestinian communities.

Question:

“I was disappointed that the administration recently chose to waive sanctions related to Nord Stream 2, especially in the midst of Russian aggression against Ukraine. How does the administration plan to ramp up its efforts to preserve Ukraine’s security and ensure that increased European reliance on Russian gas does not diminish countries’ willingness to stand up to Russia and oppose any malign activities?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The United States is unwavering in its support for Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and chosen European path. The United States continues to consult closely with Ukraine and frontline Central and Eastern European Allies and partners regarding our continuing opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and the risks it would pose to European energy security. The Administration waived sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, its corporate officers, and its German-national CEO, in line with the President’s commitment to rebuild relations with our allies and to provide space to engage Germany diplomatically on how it can address our concerns about the impact the pipeline would have on Ukraine and European energy security. Those conversations continue, and we expect Germany to take serious, concrete measures in this regard.

Questions for the Record from Representative Greg Steube
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“You, Secretary Blinken, announced \$110 million in new economic assistance to Palestinians, including \$5.5 million in immediate relief to Gaza, \$360 million in urgent support to Palestinian people. This was before knowing how much money is needed to repair damage inflicted from the conflict. The U.S. legal framework designates Hamas as a terrorist origination, and limits what funding can be offered to the Palestinian Authority. How closely are you following the legal framework with these immediate assistances?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Administration provides assistance in a manner consistent with U.S. law and does not direct assistance to Hamas. As we do around the world, the Administration will provide assistance in the West Bank and Gaza through experienced, trusted independent partners on the ground, who distribute directly to people in need.

Question:

“How can you ensure the PA is not collaborating or providing funding to Iran? It is also worth noting that in the past, Iran has funded Hamas and supplied them with military weapons, rockets, and drones. During Biden’s 2020 presidential campaign, he stated, “I’m not going to place conditions for the security assistance given the serious threats that Israel is facing, and this would be, I think, irresponsible.” We should continue to oppose any reductions in funding or added conditions on security assistance, which would be detrimental to Israel’s ability to defend itself against all threats.”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: We have no indication the Palestinian Authority is collaborating with, or providing funding to, Iran. Regarding Iranian support to Gaza-based militants, we assess that Tehran continues its decades-long materiel and rhetorical support to both Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. On U.S. security assistance to Israel, the President played an important role in negotiating the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the United States and Israel, the largest commitment to security assistance in U.S. history. The Biden-Harris Administration will uphold the commitments in the 2016 MOU without reservation and does not support placing conditions on military aid to Israel.

Question:

“During the hearing you committed to working with Congress as the administration develops plans to provide U.S. assistance in Gaza. As I said, I remain deeply concerned that Hamas terrorists are poised to exploit any assistance flows given their dominant position in Gaza. What mechanisms does the State Department have in place today to guarantee that U.S. taxpayer dollars do not fund terrorism through UN agencies, including but not limited to UNRWA?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I am committed to ensuring U.S. government funding does not end up in the hand of terrorists, including Hamas. The Administration provides assistance to trusted international organizations and nongovernment organizations in a manner consistent with U.S. law. We take our oversight of UN operations, including UNRWA, seriously to ensure U.S. taxpayer-funded assistance is reaching the intended recipients. UNRWA has measures in place to ensure no support goes to terrorist organizations, including vetting of staff, contractors, and beneficiaries and robust monitoring of its programs, and any allegations of such an occurrence are thoroughly investigated and addressed.

Question:

“What is the vetting process that the State Department and its interagency partners plan to undertake in evaluating recipients of funds that will be provided as part of any planned assistance related to the situation in Gaza?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Administration provides assistance in a manner consistent with U.S. law and does not direct assistance to Hamas. The Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development have a robust vetting process to mitigate the risk that U.S. government resources could inadvertently support Hamas or other terrorist groups. In addition, our development and humanitarian partners in the West Bank and Gaza have aggressive risk-mitigation systems in place aimed at ensuring U.S. taxpayer-funded assistance reaches its intended recipients.

Question:

“What is the State Department’s process to monitor the disbursement of U.S. funding to any subcontractors of primary assistance recipients?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department ensures disbursements and payments of federal assistance funding follow its federal assistance policy. This policy requires grants officers (GO) to monitor the prime recipient of the award and how payments are issued. The GO also monitors how much of the prime grant will be subcontracted, and ensures the prime grantee has appropriate procedures to manage those subrecipients and subcontracts. The prime grantee is responsible for monitoring the subrecipients’ performance and expenditures. The GO ensures effective

monitoring through reviewing performance reports and payment requests, which document subrecipient and subcontract activities are in accordance with the terms and conditions of the award.

Question:

“What certifications related to terrorism does the State Department require of any recipients of U.S. assistance such as that being considered related to the situation in Gaza? What is the mechanism in which these are conducted and how often are they reviewed? Have you received any such certifications from organizations you intend to use? If so, from which organizations have you received these certifications?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Administration provides assistance in a manner consistent with U.S. law and does not direct assistance to Hamas. To receive a grant or cooperative agreement from the U.S. Agency for International Development, all development and humanitarian partners must sign an antiterrorism certification that they are not providing material support or resources to any individual or entity (including Hamas) that commits, attempts to commit, advocates, facilitates, or participates in terrorist acts. This certification must be received prior to the start of any program.

**Questions for the Record from Representative Sara Jacobs
 “The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
 House Foreign Affairs Committee
 Monday, June 7, 2021**

Question:

“I appreciate the Administration’s request for increased funding for the Prevention and Stabilization Fund and the Complex Crises Fund. These funding commitments are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the Global Fragility Act (GFA). I understand the Administration is still reviewing the Strategy released last year and deciding on the five priority countries/regions.

Could you provide us all an update on where the Administration is in the process and when we might expect to hear about the selected countries?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The White House is leading a review of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability to ensure the strategy takes into account the impact of COVID-19, the global economic crisis, gender inequality, and climate change. The White House is also leading the country and region selection process that, when completed, will be followed by Congressional consultation and final approval by the President. The country selection process is based on objective criteria outlined in the Global Fragility Act (GFA). I will support this process in close consultation with our Embassies, other Departments and Agencies, Congress, and civil society.

Question:

“The Global Fragility Act (GFA) requires the U.S. government to consult with a broad range of stakeholders, including local actors, when developing strategies and programs to address and prevent conflict and violence.

How does the State Department plan to ensure diplomats are able to take calculated risks to meet with local civil society and peacebuilding organizations to get a clearer understanding of local realities and perspectives?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Diplomacy needs to be at the forefront of U.S. efforts to address and prevent conflict and promote stability. The Global Fragility Act (GFA) recognizes and reaffirms the Department of State’s role as the policy lead for work countering instability and promoting resilience, and it commits the U.S. government to more expeditionary efforts including co-deployment of our diplomats with military and development officials in the field where possible. We cannot lead from behind. We continue to prioritize people-to-people engagement and relationships while taking into account a wide range of threats and constantly analyzing and

balancing risk as we work to safeguard our people. The Department recognizes that advancing foreign policy often involves diverse types of risk and that taking conditions-based risks can be essential to advancing American interests.

Question:

“What are the key challenges facing this effort and how can Congress play a role in addressing this?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: I am happy to work with you and the Committee on possible legislative approaches to improving our risk management culture and practices. Department personnel work around the world, including in high threat/high risk locations, to promote American interests and advance U.S. foreign policy objectives, including in dangerous locations. Security infrastructure, logistics, and training are expensive and must be sustained over time to advance U.S. interests abroad. Under the 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review, we are already exploring ways to increase the co-deployment of our diplomats with military and development officials in the field. In addition, to advance Global Fragility Act implementation as envisioned, we may wish to explore additional flexibilities, such as earmark relief, additional authority to transfer funds, and reduced reporting requirements.

Question:

“Peace Direct recently released a report, *Time to Decolonize Aid*, that explains how structural racism manifests itself in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors, resulting in unequal power dynamics in the international aid system. One of its findings was that “local civil society is currently being overlooked and their context-specific knowledge, innovativeness, and strong local networks are not mobilized to their potential. **How will the State Department and USAID ensure that they are supporting locally-led solutions to problems in other countries and provide more direct funding to local and nontraditional partners?**”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Over the past decade, the Department and USAID have made considerable progress in understanding local systems, and we are investing in and committed to foreign policy and assistance that strengthens locally-led development and capacity-building. In the past decade alone, USAID has more than doubled its volume of awards to local governments, nongovernment organizations, private sector partners, and other entities through its Local Solutions Reform effort. Today, this work is guided by USAID’s Local Systems Framework and the New Partners Initiative to ensure local voices and marginalized populations are at the decision-making table. In addition, State and USAID are responding to Executive Order 13985, which outlines responsibilities for advancing equity, civil rights, and equal opportunity.

Question:

“What else does the State Department plan to do to address the legacies of colonialism?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: By operationalizing Executive Order 13985, we will work to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities, as a national security priority and an integral part of our foreign affairs mission. The Department continues to empower overseas local movements and strengthen civil society; build coalitions of likeminded nations and engage international organizations in the fight against systemic racism and discrimination; counter concerted malign influence of state and nonstate actors sowing racial discord; as well as promote democratic principles, fight corruption, and increase access to justice through reform efforts. These efforts confront systems perpetuating deep-seated inequities and the oppression of racial, tribal, ethnic, and other minority communities.

Question:

“The United States currently owes more than \$900 million in arrears to the United Nations, primarily in peacekeeping contributions. The Biden Administration has requested \$300 million to start paying down these arrears, a third of what will be needed, and a waiver on the 25% cap on U.S. peacekeeping assessments.

Could the State Department explain the impacts of arrears on the U.S. reputation and ability to advocate for important reforms at the United Nations?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The United States’ influence at the UN – including the influence we need to push back against China and others and to lead reform efforts – is greatest when we pay our bills in full and on time. When we do not fulfill our financial obligations – both on the UN regular budget and the peacekeeping budget – it undermines U.S. credibility and leadership at the UN. In preparation for the triennial scales of assessment negotiations, I am reviewing various options to reach an agreement in the UN General Assembly to lower future U.S. assessment rates. To support this process, the United States requires a legislative waiver to pay our assessed contributions to the UN in full during FY 2022.

Question:

“What kinds of reforms does the Administration hope to see at the UN and the Department of Peace Operations?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: UN peacekeeping is one of the most effective mechanisms for sharing the burden of addressing threats to international peace and security. We seek to constantly improve

peacekeeping efforts. I am committed to strengthening and improving UN peacekeeping while providing missions with realistic and achievable mandates, as well as the necessary resources to fully implement those mandates. This includes ensuring well-trained and well-equipped troops and police are deployed on all peacekeeping missions. I will prioritize accountability for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in peacekeeping missions, which is a key aspect of our overall peacekeeper performance and accountability policy.

Question:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health care. UNFPA estimates that in the first year of the pandemic, 12 million women experienced disruptions in contraceptive access, with disruptions averaging 3.6 months and resulting in 1.4 million unintended pregnancies.

How does the President’s budget address these disruptions to access to reproductive health services and further bolster access to reproductive health and family planning services?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The President’s Fiscal Year 2022 budget request reaffirms U.S. support for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), a critical partner in ensuring access to reproductive health and family planning services. Supporting such care for women and youth in more than 150 countries, UNFPA is leading the coordinated effort to accelerate progress towards ending the unmet need for family planning, preventable maternal deaths, and gender-based violence and harmful practices like early, child, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. With more than half of maternal deaths occurring in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, I am fully committed to strengthening U.S. support for women’s health globally including through UNFPA’s lifesaving interventions and its humanitarian response.

Questions for the Record from Representative Ronny Jackson
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“COVID-19 has changed our lives over the past year and a half. We must hold China accountable for the role it had in the development of this pandemic.

President Biden has ordered the Intelligence Community to report back on the possibility of SARS-CoV-2, the first that causes COVID-19, having emerged from a laboratory incident. What does the State Department believe to be the origins of COVID-19? What are your plans for the Department to fully investigate the origins?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: For months, we have conveyed our serious questions about the pandemic, including its origins within China. We will continue pushing for a stronger, multilateral, transparent, and expert-led evaluation of the origins of the virus in China. The U.S. Intelligence Community has not yet reached a definitive conclusion into the precise origins of the pandemic but has coalesced around two likely scenarios for the origin of the virus: 1) it emerged from human contact with an infected animal; or 2) it emerged from a laboratory accident. The U.S. Intelligence Community, in cooperation with other elements of our government, is continuing efforts to collect and analyze information, and we look forward to hearing the conclusions of the report.

Question:

“Secondly, one of my primary goals in my freshman year of Congress is to ensure that taxpayer funds are used in a responsible and appropriate manner. I want to be sure that there are accountability measures for the money that we send overseas, especially for combatting our adversaries and for maintaining our competition with China. The budget request includes almost \$1.8 billion for multilateral climate change and environmental funds and programs, broadly stated as supporting Paris Agreement targets and contributing to the Green Climate Fund.

How can you assure the American people this money will be impactful when there appears to be no clear parameters for use of U.S. taxpayer dollars within these slush funds?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The FY 2022 request seeks to restore U.S. global climate leadership and advance national and economic security interests by unlocking deep emission reductions in other countries, opening overseas markets for U.S. technologies and services, and increasing resilience to climate change impacts in the most vulnerable countries. U.S. support for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) makes concessional financing available to developing countries to meet their

climate goals without relying on China. As a member of the GCF's board, the United States has sought to advance U.S. policy objectives related to good governance, transparency, and accountability across the Biden, Trump, and Obama administrations.

Question:

“Which specific countries will this money be targeting?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Solving the climate crisis requires a global response, as more than 85 percent of annual greenhouse emissions come from outside the United States. The Administration's request seeks to restore U.S. international leadership and build global coalitions to address the climate crisis, and it also helps ensure that developing countries – especially major carbon emitters such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa – increase climate action and meet their Paris Agreement commitments. The request for adaptation funding will target the most vulnerable countries to help them prepare for, adapt to, and recover from climate change's adverse impacts – prioritizing human health, national security, and global stability.

Question:

“Lastly, the Chinese Communist Party is continuing to exploit countries, particularly in Africa, and their need for infrastructure and capital to leverage concessions and increase dependence on China. Much of the continent already utilizes Huawei and other compromised telecom systems. How is the U.S. messaging the dangers of Chinese investments in infrastructure and telecommunications as it relates to surveillance and privacy concerns?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The United States is engaging countries publicly and privately across the world, including in Africa, to share our concerns about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted, or controlled by the PRC. We are working with our allies and partners to support a vibrant and diverse supply chain of trustworthy telecommunications equipment and services. This includes support for open, interoperable approaches like Open RAN (radio access network) technologies that promise to increase vendor diversity and market competition and has the potential to lower costs and improve security.

Questions for the Record from Representative Jim Costa
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“What steps has the Administration – through USAID and other means – undertaken to assess the scope, scale, and nature of humanitarian needs among Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh) and to provide much-needed assistance to this at-risk population?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Department, in coordination with USAID, continues to work with our partners to assess humanitarian needs for those affected by last fall’s fighting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Since the beginning of FY 2021, the United States has provided more than \$5 million dollars to humanitarian partners to provide food, shelter, water and sanitation, and cash assistance to the conflict-affected populations in the region. This Administration is deeply committed to working on lasting solutions for all those displaced by the conflict.

Question:

“How has the Administration engaged to ensure the safe return of Armenian Prisoners of War and captured civilians from Azerbaijan?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: We continue to call on the parties to respect their obligations under international law and ensure the humane treatment of all detainees. We have urged the parties to engage fully with the relevant humanitarian actors to complete the exchange process for all prisoners, detainees, and remains expeditiously. We have advocated extensively for the release of the remaining detainees both publicly and privately. Most recently, U.S. officials working with the Georgian government successfully negotiated the return of 15 Armenian soldiers held by Azerbaijan on June 12.

Question:

“For two weeks last month, thousands of rockets were launched from Gaza toward Israel. I appreciate your strong support for Israel’s right to defend its citizens. Now that a ceasefire has been reached, do you have thoughts on how the U.S., working with Israel, can help prevent Hamas and other terror groups from rearming? How can we best work to prevent a future conflict?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: We are actively working with Israel and other allies and partners to counter the flow of materiel and financial support to Hamas and other Gaza-based militant groups. We

will need to avoid possible flashpoints, rebuild, and address the causes that led to the recent crisis. To that end, we are strongly encouraging both the Palestinians and the Israelis to avoid unilateral actions including settlement activity, annexation, and demolitions, as well as incitement to violence and providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism.

Question:

“President Biden has made clear his desire to return to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement if Iran comes back into compliance, and only then negotiate a follow-on agreement. I am highly skeptical Iran will ever accept an agreement that truly addresses our concerns with its nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and regional aggression. If a return to the JCPOA is achieved, the president has made clear a “longer and stronger” agreement is still needed. Could you please describe in greater detail what that would mean? What are the minimums you see necessary to achieve a “longer and stronger” deal?

President Biden has made clear his desire to return to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement if Iran comes back into compliance, and only thereafter negotiate a follow-on agreement. I am somewhat skeptical Iran will ever accept an agreement that addresses our concerns with its nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and regional aggression. Can you update the committee on the status of efforts to engage with the Iranians? Do you have a plan if Iran continues its refusal to engage in talks?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The U.S. delegation, led by Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley, has returned from the sixth round of talks in Vienna. Meaningful progress continues to be made on both nuclear and sanctions-related issues to reach an understanding on a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA, but outstanding issues remain. If we are successful in achieving a mutual return to JCPOA compliance, we intend to build on that as part of a comprehensive approach using a variety of policy tools to address other issues of concern.

Question:

“President Biden recently announced its plan to distribute 80 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine by the end of June, stating that “The United States will be the world’s arsenal of vaccines.” It’s clear that the need for vaccines is high around the globe and countries need our support. Does the Administration have a policy in place for countries that wish to purchase vaccines from our stockpile? If not, is there discussion within the State Department about formulating such a policy?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: On June 3, President Biden announced plans to share 80 million doses from the U.S. vaccine supply and will continue to donate doses as supply becomes available. The President also announced that the United States will provide 500 million Pfizer vaccine doses to

Gavi for distribution by COVAX to 92 low- and lower middle-income countries and economies, as well as the African Union. The United States is also working with U.S. vaccine manufacturers to increase vaccine supply that the rest of the world may purchase in a way that also creates jobs here at home. To accelerate domestic manufacturing, Pfizer and Moderna have increased their capacity to produce vaccines for the world and are exporting doses to fulfill international contracts.

Questions for the Record from Representative Brad Schneider
“The State Department’s Foreign Policy Strategy and FY22 Budget Request”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Monday, June 7, 2021

Question:

“Thank you for so generously sharing your time with the House Foreign Affairs Committee earlier this month. I very much appreciated your candor and willingness to answer every question directly.

I first want to share that I am proud my legislation to strengthen the Global Engagement Center within the Department of State, the office tasked with countering foreign disinformation and propaganda campaigns, was signed into law and appreciate your commitment to this effort by including resources in the President’s FY 22 Budget Request. I am also proud that my legislation, with Representative Chris Smith, to elevate the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism became law this year. With incidents of antisemitism on the rise across the globe, I appreciate your commitment to moving expeditiously in getting this critical role filled as soon as possible. I also appreciated your comments on the Abraham Accords and look forward to working with you and the Administration on my legislation, the Israel Relations Normalization Act of 2021, to strengthen and expand upon these peace and normalization agreements.

One of the biggest threats to the prospects of peace in the Middle East is Iran. I have said time and again, and will continue to reiterate, Iran must never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon—under any circumstance, at any time. I know you agree with me on this. While the 2015 JCPOA had gaps and shortcomings and though it was incomplete, it placed constraints on Iran’s nuclear program and created time for our government and allies to close these gaps and address such shortcomings. We’ve lost time and Iran is now in gross violation of the agreement, and consequently much closer today to a nuclear weapon than at any point in history. The Biden Administration has made clear its desire to return to the framework of the 2015 agreement if Iran first comes back into compliance. As well, the Administration has repeatedly indicated that the JCPOA is the beginning point, not the end of the necessary efforts to address Iran’s malevolence. In addition to nuclear enrichment, these include Iran’s ballistic missile program, support for terrorist groups in the region and around the world, and human rights violations at home. With respect to the Administration’s efforts to address the Iranian threat, can you share an update on the status of the negotiations? Based on the indirect conversations thus far, do you believe Iran is negotiating in good faith and serious about taking the necessary actions to end its relevant programs?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The U.S. delegation, led by Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley, has returned from the sixth round of talks in Vienna. Meaningful progress continues to be made on both nuclear and sanctions-related issues to reach an understanding on a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA, but outstanding issues remain. The discussions are thorough,

thoughtful, and business-like, but they do remain indirect. These last few rounds of discussions helped to crystallize the choices that need to be made by Iran and by the United States in order to achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

Question:

“Are the current discussions operating on any sort of timeline? How can we be sure these talks do not continue unresolved while Iran continues to clandestinely develop its skills and technologies?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Meaningful progress continues to be made in Vienna to address nuclear and sanctions-related issues to reach an understanding on a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA, but outstanding issues remain. There were no expectations this process would be easy or quick. The talks will continue while at the same time we continuously assess any progress Iran makes in its nuclear program to ensure that a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA would still achieve the non-proliferation goals of the deal. To this point, we are confident that it would.

Question:

“President Biden and you have both indicated the U.S. will rejoin the JCPOA if Iran comes into compliance. What do you consider the threshold for satisfactorily achieving “compliance”?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The JCPOA creates clear and specific commitments for Iran, including strict limits on their nuclear program and invasive transparency requirements. Returning to JCPOA compliance will require them to meet all those commitments. Our discussions in Vienna are simply about the nuclear-related steps Iran would need to take to undo the steps they have taken since U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA beyond their JCPOA limits, including enriching uranium to 60 percent; using more and more advanced centrifuges than permitted; and increasing its stockpile of enriched uranium. Following a return to compliance, Iran would need to remain in compliance with its JCPOA commitments.

Question:

“President Biden has also made clear a “longer and stronger” agreement is needed. Can you describe what this means? What are criteria would meet your definition of “longer and stronger”?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: A mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA would only be the beginning of our work, not the end. We will consult closely with Congress as well as with our Allies and partners in the region and beyond to use follow-on diplomatic efforts to continue to guarantee the

non-proliferation benefits of the JCPOA in the long term and to address other issues of concern with Iran, such as missile proliferation and other destabilizing regional activities.

Question:

“I have long been supportive of U.S. foreign assistance to Israel, including security assistance, and appreciate the full assistance in accordance with the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding being a part of the President’s Budget Request for FY 22. Israel’s deployment of the Iron Dome missile-defense system is an important example of U.S. resources enabling Israel to defend itself from terrorist rocket attacks and saving countless lives, both Israeli and Palestinian. In the recent fighting between Hams and Israel, Hamas fired more than 4,300 rockets at Israel. Iron Dome is estimated to have been 90% effective in intercepting rockets that would have otherwise reached civilian targets. Thank you for your commitment to replenishing interceptors for Iron Dome and for sharing that you are in discussions with Israeli government officials about their needs. Can you please expand on how, and to what extent, the Iron Dome missile-defense system saves lives, both in Israel and in Gaza?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The Iron Dome Missile Defense system, which the United States and Israel developed together, saved the lives of countless Israelis during the recent escalation between Israel and Gaza-based militants. The 11-day crisis included rocket attacks on Israeli population centers, but the Iron Dome system intercepted thousands of incoming projectiles, minimizing Israeli casualties. Iron Dome’s interception rate during the May 2021 flare-up, which the Israel Defense Forces said was approximately 90 percent, reduced the likelihood of an Israeli ground incursion to target terrorist infrastructure in Gaza. Such an operation almost certainly would have resulted in the loss of significantly more lives on both sides of the escalation.

Question:

“The scale and speed of the rocket launches by Hamas required use of much of Israel’s Iron Dome interceptor inventory. Do you have a sense of timing and size of such a request for additional interceptors?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: Regarding the Iron Dome Missile Defense System, we are prepared to work with Congress to support the President’s commitment to Israel’s security by assisting Israel in replenishing its capabilities. The Department of State is working closely with the Department of Defense to engage with the Israeli government to discuss its needs. I do not have any details to preview at this point.

Question:

“President Biden and you have both indicated opposition to imposing new conditions or restrictions on assistance to Israel. Will you continue to oppose new restrictions on U.S. assistance to Israel, our most important and most reliable ally in the region?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The President’s commitment to Israel’s security is ironclad. The President played an important role in negotiating the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on security assistance, the largest commitment of U.S. security assistance in history. Under the terms of the \$38 billion MOU signed by the United States and Israel in 2016, the United States set funding for Israel at levels of \$3.3 billion in foreign military financing assistance and \$500 million for cooperative programs for missile defense through the Department of Defense per year over a period of ten years. The Administration will uphold these commitments in the 2016 MOU without reservation and does not support placing conditions on military aid to Israel.

Question:

“Following the recent conflict in Israel and Gaza, what is the Administration doing to bring the parties together and start to build the conditions for progress towards peace?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: We are working with the United Nations and other international stakeholders to provide rapid humanitarian assistance to Gaza and to marshal international support for Gaza recovery efforts. We are doing this in partnership with Israel and the Palestinian Authority in a manner that does not permit Hamas to restock its arsenal. Longer term, our efforts are focused on encouraging constructive, positive steps that we hope will directly improve the quality of life in the immediate term and keep the possibility of a negotiated two-state solution alive.

Question:

“What is the Administration doing/considering to preserve the possibility for a two-state solution? What steps are you taking to move that possibility closer to fruition?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: We are pursuing an affirmative and practical approach that encourages constructive, positive steps to preserve the possibility of a negotiated two-state solution. To that end, the Administration is strongly encouraging both Israelis and Palestinians to avoid unilateral actions including settlement activity, annexation, and demolitions, as well as incitement to violence and providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism.

Question:

“Shifting subjects, as we work together to combat the climate crisis, we know that there are sectors of our economy like aviation that will be inherently difficult to decarbonize. In the case of aviation, because the vast majority of aviation emissions come from the burning of jet fuel – as opposed to, say, on-ground operations that can be electrified – efforts to decarbonize must focus on biofuels that reduce greenhouse gas emissions over their lifecycle. I recently introduced the Sustainable Skies Act that would provide tax incentives for the use of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) that demonstrates a lifecycle analysis of at least 50% greenhouse gas reductions. My legislation relies on the work of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in developing rigorous, validated methodologies for verifying the lifecycle reductions of a given SAF pathway.

Will the Biden Administration work within ICAO and other international organizations to focus the aviation industry on emissions reductions and sustainable practices, and if so, how?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: President Biden prioritizes diplomatic efforts aimed at enhancing climate ambition in multilateral fora for international aviation. To that end, we continue to closely engage on aviation emissions at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Our delegation actively participates in ICAO’s Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), which includes incentives for the use of SAF based on lifecycle emissions methodologies, as you mentioned. The United States, alongside other ICAO Member States, continues to advance a long-term aspirational goal for international aviation emissions to make sure CORSIA and other ICAO initiatives effectively reduce aviation sector emissions.

Question:

“How can the Biden Administration apply the successful model of ICAO’s work on SAF to other difficult to decarbonize industries within international commerce – like shipping or energy-intensive manufacturing – to spur cooperation and mutual development?”

Answer:

Secretary Blinken: The lessons learned from progress made in ICAO’s work on SAF should be considered when addressing other hard-to-abate sectors, while recognizing that these sectors do not all operate in the same way. In shipping, for example, the United States is pushing in the International Maritime Organization to adopt a goal of zero emissions by 2050. But we also help drive the global decarbonization effort in the shipping sector. For example, the United States co-leads the Zero Emission Shipping Mission, a Mission Innovation initiative, that promotes public and private investment in R&D for zero-emission fuels and vessels. The initiative aims for five percent of the global deep-sea fleet to be capable of running on zero-emission fuels by 2030.