

**AMERICAN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL
LEADERSHIP: REVIEW OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2025
STATE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REQUEST**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

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AMERICAN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: REVIEW OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 STATE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REQUEST

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2024

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:35 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin presiding.

Present: Senators Cardin [presiding], Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Merkley, Booker, Van Hollen, Risch, Romney, Paul, Young, Barrasso, Cruz, Ricketts, and Scott.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will to come to order.

Secretary Blinken, welcome. We very much appreciate your being with us today and back in the committee room that you are very familiar with, and we thank you for your extraordinary effort on behalf of the United States.

We know that you have been doing a lot of traveling, a lot of talking, promoting American diplomacy based on our values, and we thank you very much for all of your service and we look forward to this hearing every year as we go over particularly the fiscal year 2025 budget.

I often speak about the importance of adhering to our values and our foreign policy. That is because I believe our values are at the core of American power and key to achieving our foreign policy goals.

This country was founded on a unique basis in the words of our Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and for two and a half centuries we have sought to live up to these ideals at home and abroad.

I think there would be bipartisan agreement that we do not always succeed, but our aspirations matter. Knowing where our North Star is matters. I think we often find a common ground on how values and principles add strength to hard security decisions.

But there are others that view the world strictly based on a survival of the fittest worldview. They say rules are for suckers and

ask the question, what are we getting from this, or worse, what do I get from this.

This approach not only sees foreign policy as transactional, it also says nations only get what they want by military force or corrupt dealings. But to not adhere to American values in foreign policy decisions is making a major strategic mistake.

To be true to our founding principles we need to support those people trying to defend human rights, those rights endowed to us by our Creator.

Sticking to our values leads to policies that encourage people to stand up to corruption, that champion the rule of law and fair play, that support democracies, that saves lives, policies that advance America's national security interests.

These issues should inform the way the United States engages with the other countries of the world. That is why the Leahy Law advocated by our former colleague from Vermont is so important to security cooperation in our foreign policies—is why I am proud that Congress has enacted and the executive branch has implemented the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act as well as the recent enactment of the Combating Global Corruption.

The department has at times opposed values driven human rights proposals when they surface in Congress. We recognize there is a little competition between the executive branch and the legislative branch.

But I think we all agree that we are stronger when we work together, and when we coordinate our activities and work in unity it is a lot better for our nation, and I think your training here as the staff director of this committee has served you very well because I applaud your efforts to try to coordinate as strong as we can the actions of the legislative and executive branch in the best interests of our nation.

Secretary Blinken, right now we face many serious world crises. Some of these conflicts are in the headlines: The war in Ukraine, the Hamas attack on Israel, the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Others get only passing mention like Haiti or Venezuela, Burma, or Sudan. But whether they attract widespread attention or not, all of these crises are important, from reducing the spread of malicious disinformation to reducing the threat of nuclear war, from modernizing our diplomatic corps to responsibly harnessing the power of AI, from fighting Putin in Ukraine to fighting the effects of climate change.

The Department of State and the work of our diplomats do every day has never been more important. This committee understands the need for a healthy and thriving American diplomatic presence around the world.

I want to thank Senator Risch for working with me on this year's State Department authorization bill. This will be our fourth authorization bill in 4 years after a long hiatus.

I am glad that we had an opportunity to discuss that during last week's hearing with Secretary Verma. We need to incentivize diversity initiatives and modernize the training and professional developments for our diplomats to deal with the 21st century challenges.

This bill really underscores the importance we put on supporting the work of our State Department.

Secretary Blinken, I want to thank you personally for all you have done and the hard work you have done to promote the strength of our diplomacy in the State Department and its mission around the world.

I know that you have traveled many miles and met with many world leaders, especially in the context of Putin's war in Ukraine, in the wake of Hamas's attack in Israel.

I would like to hear you articulate how this Administration plans to confront the challenges we face today, because despite everything that is happening and the best efforts of our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee, our foreign aid budgets have been shrinking.

What effect do you think this has had on your ability to advance American priorities, defend American interests, and project American values? What kind of trade offs have you had to make at the State Department because of the shrinking budgets?

That is the purpose of this hearing to discuss the President's fiscal year 2025 budget, and I look forward to that discussion.

And with that, let me first recognize our very distinguished ranking member, Senator Risch.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for those remarks. Let me say that it appears we are at the start of a new era in global affairs, one marked by growing instability, increasing competition, and fraying economic relationships.

This is a time for U.S. leadership and resolve. The President's annual budget, which is what we are talking about here today, shows his priorities, and there are a couple of areas in his budget request where we agree. But the request lacks seriousness, I believe, and shows an inability to make tough choices.

First, the budget's biggest focus is on climate change. That focus does not help Ukraine or Israel or help our allies compete against China.

In fact, by rejecting low carbon energy options like natural gas and pushing a green only approach the Administration is doing more to enable China than out compete it.

If the Administration wants to outcompete China, then it should focus on China's growing advantages in ports, airports, digital check technologies, and other critical sectors rather than advancing ideological pet projects.

Indeed, this proposed budget does contain a poison pill which I suspect you probably already know, Secretary Blinken, in the form of a, quote, "Green Climate Fund" which proposes to transfer U.S. taxpayer money to China through the United Nations, about a billion dollars of it.

The budget's so called outcompete China initiatives might enjoy my support if the department actually worked with this committee.

But the request of the programs to be mandatory spending is inappropriate. Mandatory programs are not subject to congressional oversight, and that is why these requests have failed in the last 3 years.

In fact, I would argue the department has perfected the art of hiding information from Congress, which you and I talked about yesterday to some degree.

On Israel, Ukraine and China and Congo, it is impossible to get honest and clear information from the department.

Instead, the President prioritizes funds for nontransparent initiatives like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure, which focuses on climate and gender infrastructure, and the department's funds are steered not by the department but by the White House, which is accountable to no one.

On Iran, the Administration's policy is fatally flawed. Outreach and accommodation have failed, and the lack of any serious strategy has come home to roost.

Iran has doubled down on its support for terrorists and flooded Russia with drones and missiles. The Red Sea remains contested and dangerous, and the U.S. Navy has spent a billion dollars on missiles to defend vessels from Houthi attacks.

Iran's unprecedented attack against Israel shows Iran doubts this Administration's resolve to punish its behavior. I am proud this committee passed the most significant Iran sanctions legislation we have seen in years—the End It Act, the SHIP Act, MAHSA Act, and legislation targeting Iranian drones are all law. Is the Administration actually going to enforce them?

Recent history suggests it will not. Rather than imposing costs on Iran, the Administration is imposing costs on Israel. We must stop blaming Israel and let Israel remove Hamas from Gaza. That is the only way to move forward.

In Europe, instability is growing and your budget request is tone deaf. Congress has asked for a Ukraine strategy, which I suspect will never be delivered.

If you were serious, funds for Ukraine would be in the base budget. Instead, the urging to continue support through long term policy with short term emergency packages is not appropriate.

In Haiti, I remain concerned—you and I talked about it yesterday again—in Haiti I remain concerned about the logistics, feasibility, and cost of the proposed multinational security support mission.

Prior international interventions over a long, long period of time in Haiti have been dismal failures, leaving the Haitian people worse off than before.

We cannot use U.S. taxpayer dollars to support an open ended, poorly conceived mission in a country plagued by extreme gang violence and political instability without some kind of assurances that things are going to be different this time.

In Africa, we have had coups in seven countries in the last 3 years. Our people continue to get kicked out of countries there. In the worst instance we are witnessing a devastating conflict in Sudan. Humanitarian needs are overwhelming, and severe food and medicine shortages are causing near famine conditions.

Yet, it took 10 months to appoint a special envoy. Even then, the appointment is for 180 days, and support for the office remains insufficient, and our partners have highlighted a lack of U.S. engagement and leadership at meetings on Sudan.

Mr. Secretary, during our first conversation after your confirmation we discussed the need for a coordination and assistance framework to help the United States get ahead of the next pandemic, so I introduced legislation that you and the White House supported, for which I am appreciative.

Despite that, this budget undermines effective coordination of U.S. global health security. I also did not and will never agree to negotiations at the World Health Assembly that would trade away U.S. intellectual property rights and give a deeply flawed World Health Organization enhanced authority and resources.

These are challenging times for the United States and the world, but our policies across the board are not helping us. We need to do better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch. I appreciate your comments.

Our witness today is Antony Blinken, the seventy-first U.S. Secretary of State. He was nominated by President Biden and confirmed by the U.S. Senate and has been our Secretary of State since January 27, 2021.

Over three decades and three presidential administrations Mr. Blinken has helped shape U.S. foreign policy to ensure it protects U.S. interest and delivers results for the American people.

He served as Deputy Secretary of State for President Obama from 2015 to 2017 and before that as President Obama's principal deputy national security adviser.

In that role Mr. Blinken chaired the interagency deputies committee, the main forum for hammering out the Administration's foreign policy. During the first term of the Obama administration Mr. Blinken was national security adviser to then Vice President Joe Biden.

But perhaps the most impressive part of his background by far is the fact that he served a 6 year stint as the Democratic staff director to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Then Senator Biden was chair of that committee from 2001 to 2003 and again from 2007 to 2009. 2007 was my first year in the U.S. Senate, and I was appointed to this committee in which then staff director Blinken was extremely helpful to this freshman member of the U.S. Senate, and I am forever grateful for his help during the transition years.

Secretary Blinken, your entire statement will be made part of our record. Without objection, you may proceed as you wish and we look forward to a robust discussion.

STATEMENT OF HON. ANTONY BLINKEN, SECRETARY OF STATE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

To you, Ranking Member Risch, all the members of the committee, it is always good to be back before this committee, and as you said I was on the other side of the dais behind where you are for 6 years. So I always appreciate the opportunity to be back here among colleagues.

And thank you for the opportunity to testify today. More importantly, thank you for the partnership that I think we have been

able to manifest together to advance American leadership in the world that is so essential for delivering on the priorities that matter to the people we represent.

The need for U.S. global leadership and for cooperation with allies and partners has never been greater. The People's Republic of China——

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

The CHAIRMAN. Will the officer please remove the person who is making these comments? Anyone who is speaking will please be removed.

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, you may proceed.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I was saying, the People's Republic of China——

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, you may continue.

Mr. BLINKEN. The People's Republic of China is pursuing military, economic, and geopolitical preeminence, challenging our vision for a free, open, secure, and prosperous international order.

Russia is committing aggression not only against Ukraine but against the principles at the heart of the United Nations Charter—sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence—that are the building blocks for global peace and security.

In the Middle East, we are standing with Israel and its efforts to ensure that what happened on October 7 never happens again as we do everything we can to bring an end to the terrible human suffering in Gaza and prevent the conflict from spreading.

U.S. leadership is needed to address humanitarian crises elsewhere around the world including in Sudan and Haiti, where millions have been displaced and many killed, and to address global issues that no country can solve alone, including food security, a changing climate, transnational corruption, the fentanyl crisis.

But with the support of Congress, we can and we are approaching these challenges from a position of strength. Because of the actions we have taken the United States is stronger economically, diplomatically, and militarily than we were 3 years ago.

We have made historic investments at home in our own competitiveness, innovation, infrastructure. We have renewed our alliances. We built new ones. We have secured unprecedented alignment with key partners in Europe, Asia, and beyond.

We have delivered essential American aid to Ukraine, and we have rallied the international community to share the burden with us. For every dollar that we have sent in economic and development assistance, others collectively have invested three more.

Now, many doubted whether bipartisan support for Ukraine and other urgent national security priorities could endure. Last month Congress demonstrated to the world that we will not pull back, when you passed President Biden's supplemental funding bill by an overwhelming margin.

Our investment abroad does not come at the expense of our strength at home. Far from it. Most of the supplemental is being spent here in the United States building up our defense industrial base, creating and supporting thousands of American jobs.

We need to keep up this momentum. That requires a State Department budget that we fully resource in order to meet the challenges of our time. The President's fiscal year 2025 budget—

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

The CHAIRMAN. You may continue.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you.

The President's fiscal year 2025 budget requesting \$58.8 billion for the State Department and USAID does this in two key ways.

First, it funds the essential missions of our department and USAID. The budget will ensure that the United States continues to be the partner of choice that countries turn to when they need to solve big problems.

In an era of renewed great power competition we must present the strongest possible offer, one that is relevant and responsive to countries' needs and that advances our security and economic interests.

That is why we are requesting \$2 billion for a new fund to build high quality sustainable infrastructure around the world. Crucially, investments like these create jobs for Americans, they expand markets for our businesses. We are requesting resources for the World Bank. With \$1 billion in U.S. funding we can unlock another \$36 billion in development fund capacity to direct to the top priorities of emerging economies.

That is an enormous return on our investment and essential for competing with China around the world. The budget also includes \$1.7 billion for international organizations including the United Nations, APEC, the Inter-American Development Bank, to help shape them in ways that reflect our interests and our values.

We are asking for \$500 million to give more people around the world access to secure internet and digital technologies.

Doing so will support our economy through the export of our technology products, and it will help ensure that we and our fellow democracies remain the leaders and standard setters in key technologies like artificial intelligence.

Our budget also includes funding to address global issues that affect the lives, the livelihoods of the American people as well as people around the world, especially the synthetic drug crisis.

It also funds our response to irregular migration, global food insecurity, public health, climate, and energy security. We are also asking Congress to fully fund the State Department's educational and cultural exchanges. These are one of the best, most cost effective tools we have for advancing our values and our interests around the world.

They support students, researchers, young professionals from our communities, who study and work abroad. To out compete our strategic rivals, we also need to invest in the foundations of our strength abroad, our diplomatic corps, and that is the second pillar of our budget.

Our budget makes a strong investment in expanding our overseas presence, opening posts in the Pacific Islands and the eastern Caribbean. It will also continue our modernization of our diplomacy.

We are organizing the department in new ways to meet these new challenges, working to attract and retain the best talent need-

ed to take them on; investing in our people in Washington and in our posts overseas with training, with technology; promoting more agility, more innovation, more efficiency in our processes.

Last year's enacted budget level represented a 5 percent cut from the year before. That challenges our efforts to deliver results that Congress and the American people want to see.

So I urge you to support this budget which helps us address the most pressing foreign policy priorities in the coming year and lays the foundation for strong leadership in the years ahead.

In conclusion, I would like to thank this committee for your recent confirmations of ambassadors and other senior officials. Any undue delays in such confrontations undermine our national security and weaken our ability to deliver for the American people.

I am grateful for the partnership of this committee and for your time. I look forward to answering any questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, members.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Blinken follows:]

Prepared Statement of Mr. Antony Blinken

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify before you.

And thank you for your partnership to advance American leadership in the world that is so essential for delivering on the priorities that matter to our people at home.

The need for U.S. global leadership—and cooperation with allies and partners—has never been greater.

The People's Republic of China is pursuing military, economic, and geopolitical preeminence, challenging our vision for a free, open, secure, and prosperous international order.

Russia is committing aggression not only against Ukraine, but against the principles at the heart of the U.N. Charter—sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence—that are the building blocks of global peace and security.

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U.S. leadership is needed to address humanitarian crises elsewhere around the world, including in Sudan and Haiti, where millions have been displaced and many killed . . . and to address global issues that no country can solve alone, including food security, the changing climate, transnational corruption, and the fentanyl crisis.

But, with support from Congress, we can and we are approaching these challenges from a position of strength. Because of the actions we've taken, the U.S. is stronger economically, diplomatically, and militarily than we were 3 years ago.

We've made historic investments at home in our competitiveness, innovation, and infrastructure. We've renewed our alliances, built new ones, and secured unprecedented alignment with key partners in Europe, Asia, and beyond.

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Our investment abroad does not come at the expense of our strength at home—far from it. Most of the supplemental is being spent here in the United States, building up our defense industrial base and creating and supporting thousands of American jobs.

We need to keep up this momentum. That requires a State Department budget that will fully resource our response to the challenges of our time.

The President's fiscal year 2025 budget—requesting \$58.8 billion for the State Department and USAID—does that in two key ways.

First, it funds the essential missions of our Department and USAID. The budget will ensure the United States continues to be the partner of choice that countries turn to when they need to solve big problems. In an era of renewed great power competition, we must present the strongest possible offer: one that is relevant and responsive to countries' needs, and that advances our security and economic interests.

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We're requesting resources for the World Bank. With \$1 billion in U.S. funding, we can unlock another \$36 billion in development fund capacity to direct to the top priorities of emerging economies. That's an enormous return on our investment—and essential for competing with China around the world.

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Our budget includes funding to address global issues that affect the lives and livelihoods of the American people, as well as people around the world—especially the synthetic drugs crisis. It also funds our response to irregular migration, global food insecurity, public health, and climate and energy security.

We're also asking Congress to fully fund the State Department's educational and cultural exchanges. They are one of our best and most cost-effective tools for advancing U.S. values and interests around the world—and they support the students, researchers, and young professionals from our communities who study and work abroad.

To outcompete our strategic rivals, we need to invest in the foundation of our strength abroad: America's diplomatic corps. That's the second pillar of this budget.

Our budget makes a strong investment in expanding our overseas presence, opening posts in the Pacific Islands and Eastern Caribbean.

It will also continue our modernization of American diplomacy. We are organizing the department and attracting and retaining the talent needed to take on 21st century challenges ... investing in our people in Washington and at our posts overseas with training and technology ... and promoting agility, innovation, and efficiency in our processes.

Last year's enacted budget level represented a 5 percent cut from the year before. That challenges our efforts to deliver the results Congress and the American people deserve.

I urge you to support this budget, which helps us address the most pressing foreign policy priorities of the coming year ... and lays the foundation for strong U.S. leadership in the years ahead.

Before I conclude, I'd like to thank the Committee for your recent confirmations of Ambassadors and other senior officials. Any undue delays in such confirmations undermine our national security and weaken our ability to deliver for the American people.

I'm grateful for this committee's partnership and your time. And I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I regret the interruptions during your testimony.

I believe it was the *New York Times* editorial page that pointed out it takes as much courage to listen as to speak out and I think you are going to hear during the course of our discussion here today that we will have different views, and I think it is critically important that we all have an opportunity to hear those views, and I regret the disruptions that took place.

We will not tolerate disruption in this committee as I have made it very clear.

We will now have a round of 7 minutes on questioning from our members.

I would ask that they respect the 7 minutes so every member can get a chance to ask questions before we run out of opportunity and time.

Let me start with the budget restrictions that you have. Senator Coons was just here. I know he will be back. He does his best to get you the most robust budget we can.

We all believe that the funds that we make available for diplomacy are great investments. Our soft power is critically important to USAID, and the list goes on and on and on.

But you got to make tough decisions. So I appreciate your help and the fact that we were able to enact the Combating Global Corruption Act that you helped make sure we got to the finish line. It does put additional responsibilities on your missions around the world to have the capacity to identify areas of corruption that need attention.

Tell me how this budget will be adequate to implement that policy and how you intend to implement that policy.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

We are determined to implement it and to support it with the necessary resources. We see, I think this committee sees, corruption as being one of the most poisonous things that undermines democracies, or countries that are attempting to become democracies, around the world. It saps people's faith in their governments, in their institutions.

It takes resources away from the actual development of the country to line the pockets of people who are engaged in corruption, and around the world we have seen time and again that as people come out to protest often the instigating factor is a revulsion of corruption.

So our ability to be able, with other countries, to help identify it, to root it out, but also to help countries develop the institutions and the processes necessary to guard against corruption in their institutions and their governance we think is a critical aspect of defending and promoting and strengthening democracy.

So we are determined to implement what has been given to us through the authorities in the act. I think the budget reflects the dedication of resources to do that.

But of course, everything we are doing, given the budget environment we are in comes with trade offs and decisions that we have to make to balance the responsibilities we have, the needs we have, with the resources that are made available. I do not want to see it come at the expense of the effort to engage in this vital work.

The CHAIRMAN. So let me talk about one of your requests for funds for Haiti—800 miles away, an area that is certainly not stable today.

We have the president of Kenya, President Ruto, who is here this week, so it is an appropriate week for us to get more information about it. You have requested funds for the U.S. to support that mission.

Tell us how important those funds are, and what are the expectations? There have been concerns raised as to whether this is an investment that can lead to a positive result. Please help us understand that.

Mr. BLINKEN. Haiti has been teetering on the precipice of all out crisis and becoming a failed state.

The CHAIRMAN. Is your mic on?

Mr. BLINKEN. I am sorry. Thank you.

Haiti is on the precipice of becoming an all out failed state now, and I take very seriously what the ranking member said.

We have discussed this on a number of occasions. There have been in years past numerous interventions in Haiti.

Some have had some near term effect in stabilizing things, but it is certainly true that we have not seen a long term stabilizing effect that has allowed the country to genuinely move forward.

So I understand some of the skepticism that exists about another mission in Haiti. But I think what we have going for us is this.

First, a general revulsion of the people at the direction that the country has taken including gangs that are dominating Port-au-Prince and trying to undermine governance, a democratic trajectory that has been disrupted by failing to have a government that actually has a clear mandate, and all of that has also had the effect of interrupting development assistance, other forms of assistance, that people so desperately need.

There is an opportunity now to do a few things. First, we have managed to move to a better trajectory politically to get back to a clearly mandated democratic government.

We have a transitional presidential council that has been established. All of its members are in Haiti working. They have a mandate now to name an interim prime minister, an interim president, an electoral council, and a national security council, all of which will be in place to try to establish a clear pathway to elections to get Haiti back on its feet democratically.

Second, the power of the gangs needs to be ended once and for all, and in particular the Haitian National Police who are outmanned and outgunned need to be given the resources and support they need to regain control.

In the last few weeks they have actually done a better job of that. They have taken back control of the airport and other critical infrastructure. In fact, today commercial flights resumed in Haiti, and we anticipate that American carriers will begin flying again in the days ahead.

But absent a clear support structure for some period of time, it is going to be very hard for the police to really fully establish that control.

So the United Nations has mandated, and other countries have stepped up to fulfill the functions of a multinational security support mission for Haiti, the purpose of which is to bolster the police. The purpose of which is to engage in operational and static support for the police to reestablish security, to create confidence in the conditions for elections, mostly police, and Kenya in particular has stepped up to provide these forces with a number of other countries.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, I will give you a chance to expand on that probably a little later.

I want to focus my last minute on the—give you a chance to give us a status of the Middle East, what is happening in regards to the conversations with Israel and Hamas in order to get an opportunity

for the release of the hostages and a pathway toward a way forward for both the Palestinians and Israelis without the terrorists.

The ICC ruling yesterday—I would like to get your view on it—I see it as a step in the wrong direction that is going to make it more challenging for us to get the parties together.

There has always been an understanding the ICC is there to deal with countries that do not have an independent judiciary. Israel has an independent judiciary. They did not give the Israelis an opportunity. We thought there was that opportunity going to take place this week.

I wanted to get your assessment as to how you see the current situations in light of what just happened at the ICC as to whether we are on track to continue to negotiate in regards to the hostages and a pause in the hostilities.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Look, we see the effort to get a ceasefire and the release of hostages as the best, most effective way forward both in getting hostages home in—creating an environment in which the people of Gaza can get more of the assistance they so desperately need and a platform for which to build a more enduring solution that provides genuine security for Israel and meets the needs of the Palestinian people.

There has been an extensive effort made in recent months to get that agreement. I think we have come very, very close on a couple of occasions, Qatar, Egypt, others participating in the efforts to do this. We remain at it every single day.

I think that there is still a possibility but it is challenged by a number of events, and I have to say, yes, the extremely wrong-headed decision by the ICC prosecutor yesterday. The shameful equivalence implied between Hamas and the leadership of Israel, I think that only complicates the prospects for getting such an agreement.

We will continue to forge ahead to do that, but that decision, as you said, on so many levels is totally wrongheaded, and we will be happy to work with Congress, with this committee, on an appropriate response.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me start there. Sometimes we do not agree on stuff but I got to tell you on the ICC you got it exactly right. Your characterization of it being shameful equivalence that they have engaged in yesterday is actually stunning.

As you know, in the last administration the Trump people did an executive order to do sanctions on certain members of the ICC who were investigating us for things that happened in Afghanistan.

President Biden's administration came in and dissolved that executive order, as you know. For your information, you probably know about this, but there is a number of us up here that are working on a legislative approach to this that includes not only the Afghanistan question but also includes the question of the ICC sticking its nose in the business of countries that have an independent, legitimate, democratic judicial system, and obviously, they finally did that yesterday.

Can you support this? Obviously, you want to—the devil is in the details, obviously, in the legislation, but do you think you can support a legislative approach to this?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator Risch, in short, we want to—let us look at it. We want to work with you on a bipartisan basis to find an appropriate response. I am committed to doing that.

As you say, the devil is in the details, so let us see what you got, and we can take it from there. But I think, from our perspective, going back and lifting sanctions that were previously implemented the intent, the purpose, was to find the best way to protect our service members who served in Afghanistan, and we believe that we did that.

But given the events of yesterday, I think we have to look at the appropriate steps to take to deal with, again, what is a profoundly wrongheaded decision.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you.

As I said, your coinage of that as a shameful equivalence, I think, is a good starting point for all of us, and it really, really deserves our attention. So we are going to spend some time on that, and I hope we can work together on that.

Let us shift to China for a minute—obviously, the biggest problem we have. In April you said China was the primary contributor to Russia's military complex, and the U.S. has strong evidence China is providing drone and missile technology, satellite imagery, machine tools, and other items that aid Moscow's defense build up.

Are you still of that frame of mind?

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes.

Senator RISCH. In that regard, what plans do you have for this? Help me out here. Where are we headed with this? I think you got it right. What do we do about it?

Mr. BLINKEN. So two things. First, just to be very clear what we are talking about, we have not seen China provide actual weapons to Russia for use in Ukraine.

North Korea is doing that. Iran is doing that. China is not. What we are seeing is China provide overwhelming support to Russia's defense industrial base. Seventy percent of the machine tools that Russia is importing are coming from China.

Ninety percent of the micro electronics that Russia is importing coming from China, and a lot of that goes to building up the defense industrial base, and we have seen as a result Russia churning out tanks, artillery, ammunition, at a record pace.

So two things. We have, first of all, identified this and called this out, called this out directly with China when I was there a few weeks ago with President Xi as well as with the foreign minister, Wang Yi.

We have called it out publicly. We brought the information to allies and partners, and it is very clear that, particularly for the Europeans who see in Russia's aggression against Ukraine a larger threat to their own security, because if it does not stop at Ukraine it is very much likely to continue elsewhere in Europe. You cannot have China on the one hand professing to seek better relations with countries in Europe while on the other hand fueling the greatest security threat to Europe since the end of the cold war.

And in my conversations with European leaders as we shared this information with them it is clear that that is exactly the way they see it, and I am confident they are engaging China on that basis.

What we have done and what we need to continue to do, one is we have already sanctioned more than a hundred Chinese entities that we have identified that were engaged in providing dual use products, other things that are on sanctions lists.

We will continue to do that, and we are working to coordinate our efforts with European and other partners who are also aggrieved—in fact, in many ways even more aggrieved by this practice because it is a direct threat to them.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you.

When you are sitting across the table from the Chinese, and you call them out on this, what do they say, mind your own business? What is their position on this?

Mr. BLINKEN. Oh, their position is that they are engaged in perfectly normal, legal trade.

Senator RISCH. Well, then that brings me to something else that we know that they are lusting over in a perfectly legal manner, and that is they want to be involved in the peace process for Ukraine, and we all know why.

They are going to descend like locusts and a plague on Ukraine when this is over with, and it is going to be over with, and Ukraine is going to need a tremendous amount of rebuilding. They want to participate in that. Your thoughts on that?

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, if that is their intent I do not think they are doing themselves any favor by helping to feed the Russian war machine, and I do not think that will be looked kindly upon by Ukrainians when the day comes when there is peace and a strong, sovereign Ukraine is fully engaged in rebuilding from what Russia has done to it.

Senator RISCH. Have the Europeans expressed to you as they have to a number of us their concerns about Chinese involvement in rebuilding Ukraine?

Mr. BLINKEN. I have to say that it is not something that I think has come up that I recall in discussions, but I am pretty confident that given the support that China is providing to Russia it is not something that will be looked kindly upon by the Ukrainians themselves.

Senator RISCH. In the few minutes I got left I want to talk about my REPO Act. You know, we got a lot of pushback on that when it started, but amazingly, most everyone has come around.

Even our friends in Germany who originally said absolutely not are now—at least got one foot on board. The Belgians, of course, who have most of the assets really have come up with some innovative ways to do this.

What are you hearing on that?

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, first of all, I applaud you for what you did with that, for the leadership on that. It has made a big difference.

Two things. Just today the European Union has gone ahead and approved the use of the interest, profits from the sovereign assets that are in Europe, for Ukraine.

Now, that is a step, but it is an important step—

Senator RISCH. And I do not disagree with that. When I met with them they talked about the difference between the principal and interest, and I guess—I am not a banker, but once the interest is earned, in my judgment, it becomes part of the principal.

So I do not understand if they use the principal, or the interest, rather, they cannot use the principal. But aside from that, their view when I talked to them was they can use the interest for a long, long time. It is fine. It sits there forever. Fine.

Mr. BLINKEN. And now they—

Senator RISCH. Whatever the solution, I am all in.

Mr. BLINKEN. So the EU has done that. But to your point, Senator, I think there are other possibilities that we are driving toward including looking at ways to collateralize the principal and to use that as the basis for a loan, for a bond, that would generate a lot more resources for Ukraine up front.

Senator RISCH. Very good.

My time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here before this committee. Thank you for your continued willingness to be in an open dialogue with the Senate and Senate Foreign Relations Committee on these important matters.

Press reports suggest that the United States and Saudi Arabia are close to finalizing the bilateral elements of a regional security deal. The Saudis themselves called the existing draft semi-final.

So I wanted to ask you a couple questions about the status of these talks to the extent that you can tell us. The first is this. It seems as if the Administration has really put their foot on the accelerator to try to get the U.S.-Saudi elements of this agreement wrapped up.

But our committee's understanding has always been that this would be in the context of an agreement that included Israel, and critically, would include real commitments for a Palestinian state.

Unfortunately, and regrettably, right now there does not seem to be the willingness or the room inside the Israeli politic to make those commitments. And so my first question is why the rush to get a deal done with Saudi Arabia when we do not even know the shape of the commitments that Israel may ever be willing to make, and two, why do we have confidence that Saudi Arabia would ever live up to the commitments that it is making?

In the national security world a mutual defense or a security treaty is a sacred trust. This is a country that 4 years ago chopped to pieces an American resident journalist.

This is a country that 2 years ago turned its back on us when we asked them to side with us at OPEC+ and instead chose Russia.

And so I would ask you to answer those two questions. Why the rush, given that we do not really understand the potential for the full agreement to come into effect, and what gives you confidence that Saudi Arabia will live up to any of the commitments it is making?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator.

A few things here. First, yes, we have sought to move forward in negotiating the bilateral U.S.-Saudi aspects of a normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

But even if we were to conclude those agreements, and I believe we actually can conclude them relatively quickly given all the work that has been done, they could not go forward, and the overall package could not go forward absent other things that have to happen for normalization to proceed, and in particular, the Saudis have been very clear that would require calm in Gaza, and it would require a credible pathway to a Palestinian state.

And it may well be, as you said, that in this moment Israel is not able or willing to proceed down that pathway. But to the extent that the agreements are finalized in principle between the United States and Saudi Arabia, that in effect calls the question, and Israel will have to decide whether it wants to proceed and take advantage of the opportunity to achieve something that it has sought from its founding, which is normal relations with the countries in its region.

And we see the possibilities for the future in that agreement. We saw them starkly, powerfully, on April 13 and April 14 when Iran engaged in an unprecedented attack and a direct attack by Iran in Israel, and countries come together led by the United States to defend Israel from that attack and defend it very successfully.

There is an opportunity for Israel to become integrated in the region, to get the security—fundamental security—it needs and wants to have the relationships that it has sought going back to its founding.

But in order for that to actually go forward, there has to be an end to Gaza. There has to be a credible pathway to a Palestinian state.

So I think one advantage of completing the work, at least in principle, with the Saudis is that the question then becomes one that is no longer theoretical or hypothetical but one that needs to be answered, and we will see what the answer is.

Look, these agreements, like any agreements, whether it is with Saudi Arabia or anyone else, you count on the other party to live up to the agreement, and if they do not there are consequences, including the agreements being in effect abrogated.

So I think it is profoundly in Saudi Arabia's interests to fulfill the commitments that they would make in the context of these agreements, and by the way, none of this will go forward before Congress has its say.

Senator MURPHY. Let me just express worry at the phrase “credible pathway to a Palestinian state,” right. A credible pathway to a Palestinian state is very different than a Palestinian state.

We have had numerous credible pathways to Palestinian states that neither side has made real upon. This is a unique, and perhaps, final opportunity to actually cement a Palestinian state, which many of us believe is the necessary predicate to peace in the region and the long term survival of a Jewish state in the Middle East.

But I look forward to continued conversations about this really important topic.

I wanted to touch one other subject with you.

You have got \$169 million in this request to counter fentanyl and other synthetic drug production around the world. Thank you for that commitment.

Later this week the Senate is going to vote on a bipartisan border security measure negotiated with Republicans that would dedicate \$20 billion to border security including substantial unprecedented new resources to stop fentanyl from coming into the country.

This amount that you have requested—the underlying budget—stands on top of the commitments that you secured at the recent summit in San Francisco from the Chinese to do some really important, dramatic things to stop the movement of precursor into Mexico and into the United States.

Just in the remaining 30 seconds to a minute, the importance of the achievement at the summit and how that dovetails with the requests that you are making. You have made substantial progress on stopping the flow of fentanyl into the United States. You are to be commended for that. But this money seems critical.

Mr. BLINKEN. First of all, I commend the efforts being made here to dedicate these resources to what is, arguably, the number one challenge we face in terms of public health and in terms of the security of the American people.

Number one killer of Americans aged 18 to 49 not heart attacks, not car accidents, not guns—fentanyl, synthetic opioid.

So this has to be, and it is for us, a number one priority. It requires a lot of work at home. It also requires a lot of work around the world, given the global nature of the threat.

With regard to China, President Biden achieved important agreements with President Xi when they met at the end of last year outside of San Francisco, and China moved ahead in publishing new regulations and cracking down on some of the companies that were engaged in producing and then transferring the precursors—the ingredients that go into making fentanyl—as well as to establishing a working group with us so that we could track this.

Now, when I was just there a few weeks ago I made the case that while this was a good start and important, more needs to happen in order for it to be truly effective in reducing the flows that are coming to Mexico of the precursors and then synthesized into fentanyl and coming into the United States, including very public enforcements of the law with prosecutions and convictions, including scheduling some precursors that China has agreed to schedule but has not yet done to make their use more restrictive, and also going at the financial networks where we have seen connections between some Chinese entities and criminal cartels in our own hemisphere and working from their end to sever those.

So we will be watching to see what—whether that happens. It is a start, but a lot more needs to happen.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Romney.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, it is good to see you, and appreciate the extraordinary commitment that you have made over the last years to continue to foster American interests around the world.

I am sure we do not agree on all the topics, but your devotion to American interests is noteworthy and certainly something that I applaud.

You know I am going to want to talk about China. China is a disappointment for those of us who followed the Second World War and then followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

We were hoping that China would align with us in some way and see more modernization and liberalization and democracy. Unfortunately, it has taken a different turn. Its ambition is to lead the world, dominate the world militarily, economically, geopolitically.

I just—on a piece of paper while we were here I just wrote down some of the tactics that I see that they are employing in their grand strategy.

In no particular order, monopolizing key industries, with TikTok being able to gather information about Americans, Confucius Institutes to be able to promote their policies in our campuses, inserting themselves through cyber systems and our critical infrastructure, buying ports around the world so that they can foster their naval commitments or naval ambition, putting in place graduate students in our universities particularly in STEM subjects to be able to steal technology, the Thousand Scholars program to do the same, inserting themselves into leadership positions in international organizations, purchasing farmland around our military installations, selling drones—Chinese drones to our police forces—spy cranes in the seaport we heard about more recently, monopolizing key raw materials around the world, stealing technology from our companies, spreading dissension in the U.S. and through the West.

I mean, it is an extraordinary list, and it goes on and on and on. That is why the former chairman and I of this committee proposed and actually got signed into law a commitment to put together a group of people, Republican, Democrat, inside government, outside government, to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with China's ambition.

Part of this legislation said that by last July the Administration would be required to submit to Congress in a classified form and with an unclassified summary the results of this strategic development.

Now, I have been offered the chance to review in camera what has been prepared. I have tried to schedule that, and that has not been responded to by the department. But does the State Department intend to submit to the law as signed by the President to actually put in place and to submit to Congress the strategy in a classified forum?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, first of all, I agree wholeheartedly with the short litany of items that you listed in terms of what China is doing to try to pursue its military, economic, diplomatic, pre-eminence or dominance in the world and across the board.

We have worked in new and effective ways to deal with that, to push back against that, and I would just say very quickly before coming to your question two fundamental things have changed in our approach to China that allows us to approach it from a position of strength.

One, what has happened here at home, the investments that we have made in ourselves with the leadership of Congress, particu-

larly when it comes to infrastructure, when it comes to the CHIPS and Science Act, when it comes to the Inflation Reduction Act.

In each of these ways we have put ourselves in a position to make sure that we are leading when it comes to the industries of the future and what I see around the world is people taking note of those investments and wanting to partner with us.

Second, we have aligned in ways that we have not before with key partners in Europe, in Asia, and beyond in the approach to China, and you see that now in convergence of the approach, the tools that we are using both individually and collectively, whether it is investment screening mechanisms, whether it is controls on outbound investment to make sure that it is not going to help industries in China that could come back and hurt us, export controls that we are doing in a much more coordinated way, working across the board to deal with some of the economic nonmarket practices that China engages in that unfairly penalize not only our workers and companies but workers and companies around the world.

I can go on down the list. But we see that convergence in very powerful ways. Now, on the strategy advisory board, first, we applaud everything that you have done and your leadership on this for many years.

We announced the public strategy back in the spring of 2022, and you were very gracious in actually being there when I put that out.

But yes, the NSC, I know, and this is with the White House, has made available the classified strategy for in camera review. I am going to make sure if there is some problem in scheduling that that happens, and I will also go back to them about what more we can do.

I know we have provided classified briefings to members and to staff on the approach that is in the strategy. But let me come back to you on making sure that you can see and other members can see the full strategy in the classified setting.

Senator ROMNEY. Well, the law that was passed called not just for a classified setting, which is certainly appropriate, but also to submit to Congress in a public setting what the summary of those strategic moves would be, and as I went through that long list of Chinese steps, those are the kinds of things I am looking for.

To say—look, our strategy is invest and align and compete. Sounds great. That may be an objective but the tactical steps of what we are going to do country by country, industry by industry, port by port, spyware by spyware, et cetera, that is the kind of detail that really creates a comprehensive strategy that can be effective.

And I guess I am concerned that as we go potentially from one Administration to the next, whether that is in, you know, 1 year or in 5 years, that we have a strategy that lasts.

Following the Second World War, George Kennan and others came to together to develop a strategy that was very successful in confronting the Soviet Union.

We are looking to do the same thing here but we have not seen anything of that nature yet, and in the law required that that be submitted to Congress in a public setting but also in a classified setting, and I would ask that you honor that commitment made in

law and provide that information both to Congress and to those of us that would want to attend a classified setting.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, and I will come back to you on that. Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I applaud your and the President's efforts to condemn Hamas' invasion on October 7, to secure a ceasefire, and to secure the release of hostages.

President Biden has also recognized, however, that the campaign carried out by the Netanyahu government in Gaza has included what the President has called indiscriminate bombing, resulted in a massive number of civilian casualties.

The NSM-20 report concluded, and I quote, "given Israel's significant reliance on U.S.-made defense articles it is reasonable to assess that Israel has used U.S. provided weapons in instances inconsistent with international humanitarian law."

Given this assessment, why did the State Department conclude that Israel's assurances that it was not using weapons in a manner inconsistent with international law are in fact credible and reliable?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator.

We have said two things from day one since October 7. One, that Israel not only has the right, it has the obligation to defend itself and to try to make sure that October 7 never happens again. The United States is committed to doing everything we can to support it in those efforts.

We have also said that the way Israel does it matters, particularly with regard to civilian protection in Gaza and the provision of humanitarian assistance to Gazans who need it, and we have been working every single day since then not only to provide Israel with what it needs, but also to do our best to help see that Palestinians get what they need in Gaza, and we see the horrific suffering of children, women, and men who have been caught in a crossfire of Hamas's making for 8 months now, and we are working every day to try to alleviate that.

When it comes to the NSM and the use of our weapons, here is what the report said. It said exactly as you quoted. Given the totality of the damage that has been done, and given the fact that we are a major provider of weapons to Israel, it is reasonable to assess that in some instances Israel has acted in ways that are not consistent with international humanitarian law. And indeed, we are investigating a number of instances, some of which are alluded to in the report, others that are not, to make those determinations.

Israel itself is investigating hundreds of incidents to make its own determinations, and indeed, there are criminal investigations underway in Israel in this area. It is very difficult to make final determinations in the midst of a war when we do not have access on the ground and when you have a almost totally unique battlefield where an enemy—a terrorist organization, Hamas—is hiding behind and underneath civilians and apartment buildings, in mosques, in schools, and firing at the Israeli forces.

So we are determined to make every appropriate determination. We are determined that there be no double standard. We have processes at the State Department including our conventional arms transfer policy, including our process that we are engaged in.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you for your explanation. I know that it is so complicated that you could go on for a while, but I think you have pointed out the challenge and the fact that assessments are ongoing, and I do feel it is important that we approach these questions in NSM-20 with as much integrity as possible.

On May 7 President Biden announced his decision to pause the shipment of the five hundred 2,000 pound bombs, and the following day he drew a red line stating that, quote, "If Israel goes into Rafah, I am not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah—to deal with the cities," and you, Mr. Secretary, reinforced this point when you said, "If Israel launches a major military operation into Rafah then there are systems we are not going to be supporting and supplying for that operation."

We are already seeing significant action in Rafah. About a million people have fled the city, and is the President going to stand by his red line?

Mr. BLINKEN. First, the President stands behind the proposition that we will always make sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself. No one has done more not only throughout his career but over the last 8 or so months to make sure that that is the case, and that will continue.

At the same time, when it comes to Rafah, we have been very clear in many conversations with Israeli leadership over the past months about our deep concerns about a major military operation in Rafah and the impact that that would have on civilians in Gaza.

We insisted that if anything is to go forward, we see a clear, credible plan to get civilians out of harm's way—not only to get them out of harm's way, to make sure that they are provided for when they are out of harm's way.

Now, you mentioned we have seen a very large exodus of people from Rafah, but they are now in places where they do not have the support that they need and that we believe is critical to provide.

We also remain very concerned about any major military operation and the impact it would have on the remaining population, given the dense urban environment in Rafah and what we have seen in other places.

And so the President has been clear about this with Israel, in public as well as in conversations with others about the fact that we will not support a major military operation.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, and that is helpful to understand.

I wanted to turn to the issue of providing aid in the situation of the challenge of food and water and medical supplies and so forth.

The NSM-20 report noted that action and inaction by Israel contributed significantly to a lack of sustained and predictable delivery of needed assistance at scale, and that the level reaching Palestinian civilians remains insufficient.

Insufficient is a very polite way, given that we now have what Cindy McCain has described as full blown famine in the north, and we are all very aware of the highly stressed conditions in the south as well.

As a result of the restrictions that Israel has had in place, we have been urging them—you all have been urging them, and I applaud that—to open more gates, to have a more systematic inspection process so far more trucks per day can get in, to make sure that once the trucks are through the gate that they can actually get to the warehouses without being attacked or so forth.

You have also supported air deliveries by ourselves and by other nations. You have also built a dock—all these things in response to the restriction of aid, and thus I was somewhat puzzled that the report concludes, “We do not assess that the Israeli government is prohibiting or otherwise restricting the transport and delivery of U.S. humanitarian assistance” because it seems like all those actions we are taking, the urging of Israel to do more and all the other air delivery and docks and so forth are all in response to the restrictions preventing sufficient aid to get in and creating famine conditions affecting a couple million people.

The CHAIRMAN. If you could respond briefly.

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes.

First, Senator, there is no doubt that the people of Gaza—children, women, men—are experiencing an acute humanitarian crisis, and food, water, medicine, shelter, all of these things are in severe short supply, and we have been working every single day as well since October 7 to try to make sure that they could get what they need.

And we have impressed upon Israel time and again the imperative of really bringing a determined focus to this, not making it an afterthought in the conduct of the war against Hamas, but an absolute priority.

They have taken steps over these many months to open access points, going back to October, to have aid go in, but it has not been sufficient by far to meet the need.

We saw much more significant progress over the last month or 6 weeks, particularly in the wake of the phone call between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu in early April where we saw more access points opening.

We saw a land route from Jordan being activated. We saw openings in the north which was critical because aid to north Gaza was particularly deficient.

That has improved, but now we have seen, unfortunately, the reverse because of the actions in and around Rafah. We see the critical transit points in the south, Rafah gate itself as well as Kerem Shalom, until recently being stopped or disrupted so that the situation the south now risks being even more egregious.

But the restrictions that have been in place in some cases it is because of concerns about dual use items and making sure that Israel could see and verify what was going in, given the history of dual use.

In some instances, it is because of the war conditions that make it incredibly difficult, but there are also things that Israel can, should, and must do to further facilitate the distribution of aid, including much more effective deconfliction with those who are providing it so convoys that are bringing the aid in can go about their work safely and securely. That remains insufficient.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Paul.

Senator PAUL. Secretary Blinken, on your recent trip to China, news reports came back and said that you reserved your strongest language for China and its dealings with Russia, castigating Beijing for allowing the war to continue in Ukraine.

The report went on to describe the exchange as such a blatant dressing down in the Chinese capital. Do you think publicly scolding China will make it more or less likely that they continue selling dual use parts to Russia?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, we have tried it both ways. We have had these conversations with China for some time in private hoping to see a change. We have not seen that, and it is important—

Senator PAUL. I would argue that we have only tried it one way. We have got the stick and almost the majority of people who work for you—everybody wants to use a stick.

Nobody is really considering that there is a carrot. So, really, for the last, let us say, 5 years or more your Administration and the previous Administration—not a lot different really—that you put impediments to trade, you add sanctions, and then you scold them.

And I mean, there is a school of philosophy or school of diplomacy that believes that public scolding, particularly in another country, can have the opposite effects—that actually you have either completely given up on this, nothing is working so why do we not just read them the riot act, and that is kind of what it looked like.

Yellen was also there recently, and she described and told the Chinese government how it should run its economy, what sectors of its economy that they should or should not subsidize, and told them as well who they can do business with, and then she threatened to impose sanctions.

You know, more or less likely to actually get them to do it? I mean, I think it is a misunderstanding of diplomacy in general to think that you going and scolding the Chinese, Yellen going and scolding the Chinese, that somehow they are going, like, go, oh, my goodness, we have been wrong all along, and because they have yelled at us and treated us like school children, we are now going to change.

I would think that the opposite might be true, that there might be a certain amount of child psychology to criticizing people, and then like a rebellious teenager they actually might end up doing more.

In addition to threat of sanctions, in addition to the scolding, we now have the Administration talking about more tariffs. So in June 2019 then presidential candidate Joe Biden tweeted, “Trump does not get the basics. He thinks his tariffs are being paid for by China. Any freshman econ student would tell you that the American people are paying these tariffs.”

Remarkably accurate, and true at that time, but now he has become jumping on the Trump train. But the thing about tariffs regardless of who pays them, the American consumers will pay for these. Tariffs are not good for the economic well being of all Americans in general.

But the question would become when you add tariffs, are you going to threaten sanctions? You are going to scold them. Now you are going to add tariffs.

More or less likely that they will do what you want? I think less likely. Everything we are doing, everything the previous Administration did as well as this Administration is heading toward less trade, disengagement from China.

Part of diplomacy might be offering, I tell you what, what if you quit selling the dual use parts to Russia. Maybe we could consider removing some sanctions on trade and actually trade more with you.

So the threat of sanctions, the threat of tariffs, actually have some effects if you are willing to remove them. The history of sanctions is more, more, more, and then, you are not doing enough, and people on the right here will say you got to do even more.

We are going to pass legislative sanctions. Nobody talks about removing them but that is the only way you get behavior to change.

And so I really think that it is a fundamental misunderstanding sort of of what is going on.

The final point I would like to make, and I will let you respond to this, is the Ukrainians still claim that victory includes the reclamation of all of its territory.

Many NATO allies are beginning to question this. Czech President Petr Pavel, who once served as the chairman of NATO's military committee, recently stated that he believes it is naïve to think that Ukraine will be able to regain the occupied territories from Russia. The commander and general of the Ukrainian army, until he was fired by Zelensky, had the same sort of comments.

I think that it is not an unreasonable thing to believe that this war may well end in stalemate with people in place, some say similar to the way Korea was.

Nobody likes it. Nobody wanted it. Nobody agrees the Russians should be there, but they are there, and they have a bigger army and more might than their neighbor.

So if President Pavel is correct in his assessment that Ukraine's war aims are naïve one of the few negotiating items Ukraine possesses is a promise to remain a neutral country, not aligned militarily.

Yet, you have repeatedly ruled out Ukraine remaining outside of NATO. If you take this off the table, you are taking off one of the things that actually is a negotiating item.

My question to you is are there any circumstances under which neutrality of Ukraine would be a negotiating item?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator. Let me try to respond to both questions.

First, if you want to look at hectoring or haranguing, I would invite you to look at the website of the Chinese foreign ministry on a daily basis in terms of what they say about us.

Second, I am not going to apologize to anyone for standing up for American workers and American companies because here is what we are dealing with.

And by the way, of course, you are right, we always try, and as a diplomat I always try, to engage our partners or adversaries diplomatically, quietly, to see if we can get the result. If we do not, then we have to use every means at our disposal, including calling them out.

Senator PAUL. And yet, everything that we have done is to add more sanctions.

Mr. BLINKEN. Let me—if I may, please, the rest of the question.

So on this what we have seen and what we are seeing now, and this goes to the tariff question, is China very deliberately using overcapacity in critical sectors to export its way out of its current economic troubles and to do that in a way that undercuts, and indeed, could gut our own workers and industries.

Senator PAUL. All of that is true but my question to you is is there an offer ever that you would undo things in exchange for behavior?

Mr. BLINKEN. Of course. Of course, and that goes with—of course.

Senator PAUL. So you want to argue tariffs are good and sanctions are good. The offer would have to be to say to the government quietly or otherwise that we would be willing to go in the opposite direction.

Mr. BLINKEN. Of course.

Senator PAUL. There is no public—I hear no public discussion, not from Congress and not from anyone in the Administration—

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, the—

Senator PAUL [continuing]. We would undo this if this. So—

Mr. BLINKEN. On their own terms. It is clear that if the conduct that we object to and that risks terrible damage to our workers, to our communities, to our companies, if they change that conduct, of course, no more tariffs.

Senator PAUL. Did you specifically discuss not having tariffs or undoing sanctions in exchange for the Chinese to quit selling dual use parts to Russia?

Mr. BLINKEN. In the—sure, if they—if their companies do not engage in that practice, we are not going to sanction them.

Senator PAUL. I did not hear any public statements of that. Did you make private statements to President Xi that you would undo trade sanctions and not put on tariffs in exchange for better behavior against Russia?

Mr. BLINKEN. By definition if they do not engage in the conduct that we object to, then we are not going to be using those tariffs or using those sanctions. But unfortunately—

Senator PAUL. But this sounds like me drawing this out of you. It does not sound to me like this is the kind of diplomacy that is occurring. If you want it to occur, you have to have a little different conception of you have got the stick.

The whole problem with diplomacy in this country, not just your Administration but the previous, is all you see is the stick, all you see is more sanctions, and if I ask you to tell me what has China done to change its behavior based on your sanctions, to change their behavior for the better, I would say you cannot come up with anything China is doing. Everything seems to be the wrong direction. That is your interpretation. Everything is the wrong direction.

Mr. BLINKEN. We have actually seen—

Senator PAUL. The sanctions really are not having a value unless you want to negotiate removing sanctions to get better behavior.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Secretary, and I want to start by applauding you and the President for your overall approach to foreign policy and national security.

You have helped strengthen our alliances, stood up to Putin's aggression, and confronted the challenges posed by China. And the President was right, absolutely right, to travel to Israel in the immediate aftermath of the horrific Hamas terror attacks of October 7 to express our solidarity in word and in deed.

But like you, I have been very concerned with the way the Netanyahu government has conducted the war in Gaza. We understand the despicable tactics of Hamas. But we also understand that there is a responsibility to make sure that a just war is fought justly, and I have been especially concerned about the restrictions placed on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to 2 million Palestinians who have nothing to do with Hamas.

It only leads to unnecessary human suffering, and as you and Secretary Austin have pointed out, it also undermines our overall strategic objectives and those of Israel. And it also means that on top of everything else Americans have spent over \$300 million to build a temporary pier in Gaza to try to prevent more people from starving.

That is the right thing to do. But we had to do it because we could not get the Netanyahu government to get more food and other aid through the many land crossings, and get it delivered to people safely without over 200 aid workers getting killed including those killed in the attack on the World Central Kitchen.

That is why virtually every international aid organization that has operated worldwide for decades says they have never experienced a worse manmade humanitarian disaster than that in Gaza.

That is why the President said at one point no excuses. And yet, in the recent National Security Memorandum-20 report the Administration cannot even bring itself to conclude what is painfully obvious to anybody paying attention, that for long periods of time between October 7 and today, the Netanyahu government has failed to comply with the international norms that require it to facilitate and not arbitrarily restrict or deny the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in desperate need.

Mr. Secretary, that hurts our credibility around the world, and it sets a dangerously low bar for what is acceptable going forward. I listened to your exchange with Senator Merkley regarding the use of U.S. weapons. This issue does not require additional investigation.

We have seen this play out in real time, and while you concluded in a snapshot that Israel had improved and was doing better, the report required a backward look, and the Administration decided to duck that.

You and I have known each other for a long time. I have tremendous respect for you. But I thought that was important to say.

I know you and the President are trying 24/7 to bring an end to this conflict. I know you are working 24/7 to bring back all the hostages and make sure that there are no more October 7s.

But as the President and you and others have pointed out, in order to achieve a durable end to the conflict we need to build a

future that has security and dignity and hope for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

That is why the President has tried to create some light at the end of this very dark tunnel by calling for recognition of Israel by Saudi Arabia and others, paired with a clear time line for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

I listened to your discussion with Senator Murphy. I have lost count, Mr. Secretary, of exactly how many times you have actually traveled to Israel and the region. My staff tells me it is about seven. Is that right?

So you, the national security adviser, Secretary of Defense, two aircraft carrier deployments, billions of dollars in military assistance, hundreds of millions to build a pier, our work—our very important work—to intercept the Iranian missiles launched at Israel.

So would you agree that it is in our national security interests to have a plan in place to achieve a two state solution within a clearly defined period of time paired with normalization of relations with countries like Saudi Arabia?

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes, I would.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And I want to raise this because for a long time the U.S. policy has been in favor of a two state solution. I mean, formally announced during George W. Bush's administration, so over two decades—and despite the fact that we say those words, we have never addressed our policy to use our influence to make it happen.

You would agree, would you not, that the continued expansion of illegal settlements and outposts in the West Bank makes it harder to achieve a two state solution?

Mr. BLINKEN. I would.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And yet, if you look at Prime Minister Netanyahu's extremist government that, as you know, includes people like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, since they came into power, and while the war in Gaza has been raging, we have witnessed the largest land seizures in the West Bank in decades.

In fact, during your visit in March, Finance Minister Smotrich, who also has a West Bank portfolio under the minister of defense, announced the single largest West Bank land grab, and the question is what are we going to do if it conflicts with our national security interests to try to achieve a two state solution?

I applaud the actions taken with respect to individual extremist settlers. But they are just part of a movement largely empowered by this current government.

I do not know if you had a chance, Mr. Secretary, to read the *New York Times Magazine* this weekend, "Israel's Extremist Takeover" by two veteran journalists, including an Israeli investigative reporter. I urge you to look at it.

So my question is, if we agree about our national security interests, what are we going to do to make sure that we achieve the goal not only of normalization—I heard the conversation—but that, as you said, has to be paired with a Palestinian state and a time line. What is the plan to get there with a time line that is meaningful?

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, thank you, Senator.

And look, I agree with the assessment, and it is not only in our national security interest, which is my responsibility.

It is also, in our judgment as Israel's closest friend, in Israel's profound interest because there really is a choice, and it is very hard to see it in the midst of this conflict, and certainly, in the wake of October 7.

But the choice that is increasingly clear is a choice between a path that leads to Israel normalizing its relations with virtually all of its neighbors, something it has sought from its founding, to have countries that actually have its back when it comes to security and the primary threat that it faces and many of us face, which is from Iran, and to be, again, genuinely integrated into the region, versus a continuation of the course that we are on and it is on, which is endless cycles of violence, disruption, death, and insecurity.

But to move down that first path it requires not only the willingness of the countries in question to normalize relations, but it also requires that there be finally a resolution to the Palestinian question, the realization of a state.

That is clearly what these countries need to see and want to see in order for this to happen, and that is one of the things that we have been working on.

The bottom line is this. You have got 5 million Palestinians between the West Bank and Gaza. You have got about 7 million Israeli Jews. Neither is going anywhere. The Palestinians are not going anywhere. The Jews are not going anywhere.

There has to be an accommodation, and there has to be an accommodation that respects and fulfills the rights of everyone concerned. It has to be done in a way that has the necessary guarantees for Israel's security, and we are and will be adamant about that.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Ricketts.

Mr. BLINKEN. That is the only path forward to sustainable security.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Ricketts.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here today.

Last Sunday the British Foreign Secretary, Lord David Cameron, was asked if the U.K. would follow President Biden's lead on withholding weapons to Israel.

He responded that when he last came under pressure to announce an arms embargo, quote, "a few days later there was a massive Iranian attack on Israel. So I do not think it would have been a wise path."

He continued, "If I announce today might help me get through this television interview, but actually it would strengthen Hamas, it would weaken Israel, and I think it probably makes a hostage deal less likely," end quote.

Hamas has not released a hostage since the end of November, and shockingly, this Administration starting in December has been ratcheting up the pressure against Israel.

Now, according to Arab mediators dealing with Hamas Gaza chief, Yahya Sinwar believes that he has already won the war, whether or not he survives it.

He has indicated to mediators that time is on his side and that the longer he waits the more international pressure builds on Israel and the more damage is done to the relationship between the United States and Israel.

Secretary Blinken, please explain why a bunch of 20 somethings on liberal college campuses are right, and the Administration thinks they are right by pursuing this policy, and Lord Cameron, who is the foreign minister of one of our closest allies, is wrong when he says that blocking weapons to Israel would strengthen Hamas's hand.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator.

Let me be clear about two things. First, no one has, no one will do more to defend Israel than President Biden. He was there days after October 7. We deployed significant assets to the region to make sure that we could deter any further aggression and a widening of the war against Israel.

When Iran unleashed an unprecedented attack on Israel, the first attack, as you know, from Iran directly onto Israel, for the first time the United States actively participated in Israel's defense.

We brought together a coalition of countries to do the same thing, and what could have been a devastating attack by Iran was thwarted and thwarted very effectively.

In terms of what we provided to Israel, again, no one has done more than Joe Biden, going back to when he was vice president, including getting the MOU that led to a 10 year agreement to provide Israel with the assistance that it needs to defend itself.

We have one weapon system that we have been holding back pending discussions with Israel about how and where it would be used because of the concerns that we have clearly expressed over many months about the possibility of a full on military assault on Rafah, a dense urban environment where using something like a 2,000 pound bomb could have terrible consequences for the civilians.

This is something that needed to be discussed. It is deeply unfortunate that that discussion leaked to the press, when it was a private discussion between us and Israel. It did, and when the President was asked about it he responded forthrightly.

But there is no final decision, and it remains subject to a discussion. But when it comes to making sure that Israel has everything it needs to defend itself, no one has, no one will do more than President Biden.

Senator RICKETTS. So you agree with Lord Cameron's assessment, though, that you are strengthening Hamas's hand by having this leak get out?

Mr. BLINKEN. No. Again, leaks are an unfortunate part of the business that we are all engaged in. It is really regrettable, but it happens.

But something that is not a leak is the fact that we have been both public and private about the fact that we have deep concerns about a major military operation in Rafah, and by the way, we

have been working closely with the Israelis on other ways to achieve what we agree needs to be the result which is ending Hamas's government over—

Senator RICKETTS. How is putting more pressure on Israel helping? How is that helping them win this conflict against what you describe yourself as a terrorist organization and an enemy?

Mr. BLINKEN. Not a question of putting pressure on them. It is a question—when your close friend is going down a path that you think may be counter to its interests and potentially our own as well, then of course, we have conversations with them.

That is what we are supposed to do. That is the nature of the relationship. We have a better way of dealing with the ongoing problem that Hamas represents in Gaza and in Rafah specifically—

Senator RICKETTS. So what kind of pressure are you putting on Hamas?

Mr. BLINKEN. What kind of pressure we are putting on Hamas?

Senator RICKETTS. When is the last time you called Hamas's surrender?

Mr. BLINKEN. Virtually every day.

Senator RICKETTS. Virtually every day you called Hamas—

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes, virtually every day I have said, Senator, that the single quickest way to end this is for Hamas to surrender, to give up its weapons, to release the hostages, to stop hiding behind civilians.

I have said that from day one, and I continue to say it, and I agree with you, one of the things that is deeply regrettable is—not by us but just across the board—the extent to which Hamas has, you know, disappeared from the conversation as if they have nothing to do with anything when they could—and I think you are 100 percent right—they could end this tomorrow, by yes, giving up, surrendering. We have called for that repeatedly. I wish more countries around the world were doing that.

Senator RICKETTS. Well, I agree with you 100 percent on what you just said there because you are absolutely right. This all ends tomorrow if Hamas surrenders, and then the civilians would be able to get the aid. There would not be any war.

I mean, Hamas is using the civilians as human shields. You mentioned—you told yourself about how they are hiding in hospitals and schools and stuff to fight the Israelis. Hamas is the problem here.

Hamas is the one who started this on October 7 when they broke the ceasefire and committed the atrocities. They have to be rooted out. They have to be destroyed. We have to have Israel be successful. What do you think of Sinwar's words when he said that he has already won by this delay? I mean—

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, first of all, I have not seen those words. Second, I would take with more than a grain of salt anything that Mr. Sinwar says about anything. So the fact of the matter is he is under and Hamas is under unrelenting pressure.

When you are a nihilist as Sinwar is, it is not entirely clear what effectively will move you. If he believes that there is victory in death, that is a different thing. We cannot necessarily deal with that in the same terms.

Senator RICKETTS. Right. Well, here is the deal. We need to make sure Israel is successful. Hamas started this war. Wars are horrible. This is why you do not start them. But now that it has started, Israel has to be successful.

During World War II we had to go into urban areas to be able to root out the Nazis. Israel must be allowed to be able to root out Hamas certainly after October 7.

Hamas said they would continue to commit these atrocities, continue to attack Israel. They cannot be allowed to survive.

That is why we need to continue to support Israel, and my concern here is that when you start putting conditions on our allies on how they have to win these conflicts such as you are also doing in Ukraine with saying, hey, you cannot go after long range Russian stuff, blah, blah, blah, when we start doing that, our allies around the world wonder if the so called ironclad commitments are going to be ironclad in the future.

We have got to support our allies to win and when we send mixed messages then our allies start questioning our commitment and that leads to a more dangerous world, Mr. Secretary.

So we have got to continue to support Israel. Please make sure you are doing that, and stop strengthening Hamas's hand by somehow signaling that somehow we are showing any weakness.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Senator KAINE [presiding]. Thank you, Senator Ricketts.

Secretary Blinken, thanks for your superb service and for being here today. I have three quick items. Then I want to get back to Israel and Gaza on the humanitarian dimension.

First, I really believe that Congress should lift its hold on the support to the multinational security force in Haiti, and I worry that the refusal to do that is really complicating our maybe small ability to push this in the right direction.

If Congress does not release the hold on appropriated funds to fund this security force, what is going to happen?

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, if we do not have those funds available then it is going to be very hard to move forward with the security force, and—look, again, I understand and respect those who express concerns about the success given the history, but I think we have a very clearly defined and achievable mission for the security force, which is to bolster the police and put them in a position where they can reassert effective control.

Senator KAINE. It was hard work for you guys to get Kenya to agree to lead this. If we do not come through on our financial commitment, is it not pretty likely that they will back off?

Mr. BLINKEN. They will—they certainly will, and of course, and then President—

Senator KAINE. And then who would take up the mantle if the U.S. is not providing support?

Mr. BLINKEN. No, I think that is exactly right. The Kenya president will be in Washington this week for a State visit. It would be good if we could fully deliver on our commitment.

But second, I would just say too here is an instance where I know some people have concerns about the United States being the quote/unquote, "policemen of the world."

Well, here is a situation where Kenya and a number of other countries have stepped up and are willing to take this on. But they need support and that is—

Senator Kaine. Absolutely.

Let me ask you a second one. This is very parochial.

The State Department requested medical providers in Northern Virginia to snap together to provide medical services to Afghans coming into Dulles Airport.

When Afghans came in in the summer of 2021, they, largely, came in to Dulles. Three of the eight resettlement sites were in Virginia, and we now have more Afghans than any other State from that initial wave.

And we are proud of it. Our Afghans are doing great work. Some are—I have met some training to be shipbuilders. They worked with us in Kabul, and now they are training to be shipbuilders and help our industrial base.

But the health care providers that responded to the State Department have not been paid. They did all this medical service. It was about \$630,000. It is not that big an amount.

We have been asking over and over and over again that they be paid. We sent a letter to the State Department—it was bicameral—in January. Have not gotten a response back. Will you work with me to make sure that these folks who jumped to attention when the State Department asked are treated fairly so that if you ask they may do it again?

Mr. Blinken. Happy to work with you on this. We have looked into this, and we have some further information that we can share with you. But the initial bottom line is that we had our procurement executive investigate this.

We learned that the company in question acted apparently on its own. Maybe they had a very good motivation, but without any contractual agreement with the Department of State or with the Cherokee Nation in this case. We need to—

Senator Kaine. Well, I want to follow up because the ones that I am talking about are folks who are directly requesting—

Mr. Blinken. I am happy to follow up with you on that.

Senator Kaine. And then, third—this is really for Senator Hagerty and me—we have a company, Vulcan, that is a U.S. based firm that has got presence in Virginia, Tennessee, and other U.S. States. They own a port and land in Mexico.

AMLO has tried to appropriate that land twice even with police and military invasions of the property. I would rather not get into that now, but I would love your commitment to work with me to make clear to the Mexican government that appropriating the private property of American companies would be very bad for this important relationship that we have with Mexico.

Mr. Blinken. Yes, I believe that is subject to a proceeding and arbitration right now. But we certainly made the generic point to the government of Mexico including to the president that, yes, seizure of private companies is not a good way to attract investment.

Senator Kaine. On Israel/Gaza I think my colleagues Senator Merkley and Senator Van Hollen have dug into this, but I want to particularly focus on what I call pillar two of NSM-20, which is a

certification that a nation receiving U.S. military assistance is cooperating with U.S. supported humanitarian efforts.

I think the pillar one, making a determination about whether Israel is or is not using these weapons in accord with international law, is more complex, but on the humanitarian side, look, World Central Kitchen Aid workers killed, other U.N. aid workers killed.

Settlers attacking humanitarian aid convoys on the West Bank, throwing stuff off the truck, setting the aid on fire, setting the trucks on fire. The U.S. having to spend hundreds of million dollars to build a pier in Gaza. Virginians from Fort Eustis are building that pier and deployed to do it.

All of that to me says you would not have—none of that would be happening if Israel was fully cooperating. It took too long to open Kerem Shalom. It took way too long to open Erez.

My editorial opinion, you have already answered questions about this—certifying that on that record the humanitarian efforts of Israel to help Gazans who are noncombatants, who are not part of Hamas, is sufficient. I think that is grading on a curve that—if that is sufficient, then anything is sufficient.

I do not think it is anywhere near sufficient. I do not think it is in the time zone of sufficient. I agree it is more than was started.

I mean, at the beginning members of the Israeli cabinet said it was going to be a complete siege against Gaza. I know that President Biden was able to get an agreement finally to open up the Erez crossing.

But I think calling this state of affairs sufficient cooperation with U.S. humanitarian effort I just think that demeans the credibility of the Administration, and I think you should have said you are not getting a passing grade on this and then laid out what more needs to be done—the number of trucks going in.

When Cindy McCain, the widow of a former member of this committee, talks about the famine that is resulting, I mean, I just do not see how the U.S. can say that is enough.

I mean, I credit—my colleagues are saying let Israel defeat Hamas. Let Israel with our help knock down Iranian drones and missiles.

I am all for that. But the punishment of noncombatant civilians, the killing of aid workers, the ransacking of humanitarian aid convoys with the idea of doing very little to stop it, how can that be sufficient?

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, we have, as you know, Senator, from day one in working on this every single day and that includes going back to October, getting the initial crossings open including in October Rafah, then later Kerem Shalom—

Senator KAINE. In December 2 months later—

Mr. BLINKEN. In December, yes. So this is—

Senator KAINE [continuing]. In Erez in March or April.

Mr. BLINKEN. Erez, Crossing 96, the Jordanian route, et cetera.

At the time of the report the NSM, which, by the way, I applaud as I think—an effective and helpful vehicle, in terms of concentrating minds and focusing minds on this.

I think we have seen that the assurances that we received in March the question was from the time we received those assurances to the time that the report was issued, did we judge them

to be credible and reliable when it came to humanitarian assistance, and we saw during that period Israel take overdue but important steps to actually expand significantly the provision of humanitarian assistance. On the last——

Senator KAINE. And on that statement—I do not disagree. They took steps between March and May but I think the steps were still woefully inadequate.

Mr. BLINKEN. And I think the report itself—if you read the report, as I know you did carefully, I think the report lays that out very clearly.

Senator KAINE. Well, I am going to call on Senator Scott because he is next.

But I just think on the factual record improvement since March, yes. I still think it falls so far below the hurdle that I do not think that warranted a passing grade.

With that, I am going to go to Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you.

Thank you for being with us this morning.

I will take a very different tack than Senator Kaine, on our support of our allies. I mean, one of the challenges I see around the world right now is that it seems like the world is on fire in part because of the weakness of our Administration—the Biden administration.

You think about the fact that China stares across the Taiwan Straits, or the Kremlin sets its sights further west, or Iran comes out of the shadows and starts attacking our strongest ally in the Middle East, Israel.

You think about the fact that in the Sahel terrorism seems to be spreading faster than ever before, and to me it just seems very clear that without question the weakness of this Administration emboldens our adversaries, and frankly, if there should be no daylight between Israel and America, it seems like there is a lot of daylight.

The more decisions that are made from the Administration to withhold shipments of weapons, the more challenges that we have, and frankly, if we are concerned about saving innocent lives it seems like to me we would provide the resources that make dumb bombs smart by having the precision technology that has been held up on tarmacs, and frankly, in shipping the weapons.

So I would like to hear your thoughts on how it is in Israel's best interest and our relationship with Israel and that best interest that we hold back not just the shipments of the weapons but the very precision technology that is necessary to turn these bombs into, clearly, better weapons and reduces casualties.

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, Senator, first and very quickly, it will not surprise you that I disagree with your overall judgment.

Senator SCOTT. It does not surprise me at all. You are right.

Mr. BLINKEN. When it comes to China and Taiwan, we have brought countries around the world together to stand up for maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, to make sure that China does not engage in any unilateral actions to change the status quo, and China is hearing that from country after country in no small measure because of our own engagement, our own diplomacy.

When it comes to Russia and Ukraine, we rallied—

Senator SCOTT. One second. Let us have a little—just a dialogue on that. Here is one of the things I would say in response to that.

When you show weakness anywhere it affects strength everywhere. When you have a botched Afghanistan challenge, when the President says that a small incursion in Ukraine might be acceptable, when he says to Putin that here is a list of areas not to cyber attack, the weakness in posture, I think, emboldens our adversaries.

And so while you may be able to name some specific things that have been done, hopefully, to reduce the impact, from my perspective most of the world really respects strength, and that is about all they respect.

Mr. BLINKEN. They respect strength and they respect wisdom, and what I am seeing and hearing around the world is that we are demonstrating both.

We have made major investments in ourselves that have put us in very good standing around the world, particularly in the competition with China as well as with Russia in different ways.

We have managed to rally 50 countries in Ukraine's defense, prevented Russia from erasing Ukraine from the map, making sure that it has what it needs to defend itself, to stand up, and even push back the Russian aggression.

When it comes to Iran, as you mentioned as well, and I mentioned this I think maybe, Senator, before you were in the room, when Iran engaged in an unprecedented attack on Israel—the first time that Iran had directly attacked Israel, for the very first time the United States actively participated with our military in the defense of Israel. That had never happened before.

We rallied other countries to Israel's defense. We thwarted what could have been a devastating attack, and I think the message was very clearly received in Iran, throughout the region, and around the world.

Senator SCOTT. Let me ask you this question.

Mr. BLINKEN. Please.

Senator SCOTT. Part of the challenge that I see there is there is no doubt that the coalition that was available for the response was a strong one. I think part of that was because of the Abraham Accords.

Normalizing relationships in the Middle East was actually impactful. So I thought to myself, this is strong to see the countries coming together in a coalition in defense.

However, part of the challenge, of course, is that on October 7 the first thoughts that come out of the Administration before they deleted it was to tell Israel to pause is a challenge.

The second thing is that you do not have to have a coalition defending Israel if there are no attacks from Iran, and so the fact of the matter is that the more we strengthen and embolden Iran by eliminating any of the hurdles, the hurdles being the sanctions, being—allowing their oil to flow easier, the November decision to provide \$10 billion, the August decision to provide \$6 billion—the fact of the matter is that the—35 percent of the Iranian economy is driven by sale of energy.

So the fact is that when we opened that up, we are actually strengthening our adversary, not making them weaker.

Mr. BLINKEN. In fact, Senator, not a single sanction has been lifted on Iran, and in fact, we have imposed sanctions—

Senator SCOTT. So relaxing the sanctions are the things that we say, right?

Mr. BLINKEN [continuing]. Sanctions on more than 500 Iranian individuals and entities. No, we have not lifted a single sanction.

Senator SCOTT. Well, I would say talk to Secretary Yellen about the conversation that we have had and that continues to be had. But the fact that we are making it easier for Iran to sell their oil, which only increases their revenue, which then is used, 90 percent of it, to attack our allies.

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, in the case of the \$6 billion that you referenced—

Senator SCOTT. Yes.

Mr. BLINKEN [continuing]. Iran has not accessed any of that. That was a channel that was established by the previous Administration to find a way to be able to—

Senator SCOTT. You are really an intelligent guy. You are a really intelligent guy.

The fact of the matter is that we all know that money is fungible. Let us not pretend that we do not know that.

So you put a credit on a balance sheet. The bottom line is you should expect that credit to be used in any form or fashion that they decide to do so. So do you think our not having the IAEA Board of Governors censure Iran was a good thing or not?

Mr. BLINKEN. It depends entirely on what we are trying to achieve and the best way to achieve it. More than unfortunately one of the worst decisions made was to get out of the Iran nuclear agreement, which would put Iran's nuclear program in a box.

Now we are dealing with a situation where the restraints that were imposed on Iran by that agreement have gone away, and Iran has been proceeding whole hog toward developing the fissile material that it needs to produce nuclear weapons in very short order.

We had the breakout time pushed back beyond a year. Breakout time is now 2 to 3 weeks. So one of the critical things is—and we have lost access that we have had—one of the critical things is to make sure that the IAEA has the access it needs—

Senator SCOTT. If the chairman will allow a response to that.

Senator KAINE. Absolutely.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you very much.

Mr. BLINKEN. And whether—and what the most effective way that the IAEA is to get the access it has, and also to ensure that Iran is moving back on the steps that it has taken to enrich its material.

Senator SCOTT. I will just say this. Anyone who thinks that having a nuclear Iran is going to make them more peace filled is ridiculous, number one.

Number two, to suggest that somehow the JCPOA was the contract that stopped Iran from doing anything—in the midst of the JCPOA they were already testing ballistic missiles. They had breached the JCPOA so many times that it was remarkable that

we would even have a conversation about bringing that back into the—

Mr. BLINKEN. But if you do not have the fissile material, you cannot make a nuclear weapon.

Senator SCOTT. For us to have a conversation about the JCPOA and how bad it was, sure. To have a conversation about its effectiveness I think is remarkable.

Mr. BLINKEN. Let us look at where we were and where we are as a result of getting out of the JCPOA.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding.] With that, Senator Coons.

Senator SCOTT. Here is the very core. You were not there.

Senator COONS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the chance.

Mr. Secretary, welcome. I look forward to our hearing later today on the budget for the State Department, and I just was going to speak to one thing first before I move to some substantive questions.

It has been posited that the world is on fire because of weakness, and I am simply going to assert that the greatest strength that you and our President have shown is in building our alliances in the Indo-Pacific—the Quad, AUKUS—a strengthened and renewed partnership between Japan, Korea, and the United States. Really remarkable successes in stabilizing and strengthening the Indo-Pacific through alliances.

In the response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, an incredible global alliance of 50 different countries coming to Ukraine's defense, providing financing, imposing and enforcing sanctions, really remarkable.

And in the defense of Israel against 300 missiles and drones fired by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the U.K., France would not have joined us in the defense of Israel but for President Biden's leadership.

So I am just simply going to assert that. Can I ask you whether it in any way weakens us to have country after country year after year have no ambassador confirmed by the Senate? Is it important that we confirm nominees to serve as ambassadors?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator.

It does hurt us and it is imperative that we get ambassadors confirmed and here is why. We are in, as we have talked about already today, in a global competition, notably, with China.

When we do not have an ambassador in place, a Senate confirmed ambassador, but the Chinese have a fully accredited ambassador in place in a given country their ambassador may get in to see the president and the prime minister on a given issue.

Ours, no matter how good our chargé may be, may not, and that puts us right there just in that one example at a competitive disadvantage.

Senator COONS. As you know well, economic competition with China and with other actors is a key priority for this Administration and for many of us. I recently had a chance to go to Angola and to see the impact of the Lobito Corridor.

I will soon be traveling to the Philippines and get a chance to see the Luzon Corridor. How important is it that we utilize new tools like the Development Finance Corporation and leverage mul-

tilateral resources to give our partners the opportunity to have more transparent, more sustainable, higher quality investment opportunities for key infrastructure?

Mr. BLINKEN. Look, it is vital that we provide a better choice, and we do that by doing a few things. Using all the tools of government to be able to leverage private sector investment, because our comparative advantage is bringing the private sector to these projects.

We are never going to out compete China or anyone else on state dollars, dollar to dollar. That is not how we do things.

But we can use these instruments to facilitate the private sector playing the role, and yes, it is to marshal the resources of other countries in a coordinated way so that together we can have a greater impact and have a better offer.

Senator COONS. Exactly.

Mr. BLINKEN. And we do it in a way that becomes a race to the top, whether it is dealing with corruption, environmental standards, worker rights, making sure countries do not get loaded down with debt.

All of those things are part of the offer that we bring to this, and I know that when we are able to make that offer, there is no question that countries around the world prefer to work with us.

Senator COONS. This week President Ruto of Kenya is here for an important state visit. He will have a chance to meet with some congressional leaders, too; obviously, meet with our president. You are hosting him at the State Department. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is having, I think, a very positive meeting with the Secretary of Commerce.

We have a very talented ambassador there who comes out of the private sector and has applied a lot of her insights and talents. This is just another reminder that we need to show up. We need to have confirmed ambassadors. We need to have robust and innovative financing tools.

Kenya has really suffered through massive floods, record drought, and locusts, and one of the things I am concerned about is food security and how food insecurity leads to instability, because hungry people move, and hungry people engage in conflict, and hungry people, more than anything, suffer. And as Cindy McCain at the World Food Programme and others have recently said publicly, 330 million people globally are food insecure and something like 800 million people will go to bed tonight.

Senator Graham and I have introduced a bill to create the Foundation for Food Security that would use blended finance tools, risk insurance, first loss guarantees, to help catalyze programs that many of us work together for many years like Feed the Future to have more of a transformational impact on national agricultural systems. Do you think this is a wise and appropriate investment?

Mr. BLINKEN. I do, and obviously, I would need to look more at the specifics of the bill. But the basic idea, the basic approach, I think, is a very good one because it is exactly as you just said. It is having that transformational impact.

Look, we are the lead provider of emergency food assistance to people around the world. We are overwhelmingly the number one funder of the World Food Programme.

We provide about one-third of its budget. I hear tremendous gratitude around the world for the work the United States does on an emergency basis, but what I hear even more than that is a desire for the investments to be made that have a transformational impact so that countries have the productive capacity to effectively feed themselves and feed others.

And so I think doing that, bringing public-private together in a focused way can make a big difference. I will add one very quick thing.

Feed the Future that USAID runs is one of the most important programs that we have in the government. It is making a difference in lives around the world.

We have added to it something called the Vision for Adopted Crops and Soil because one thing that we have understood, if you have nutritious and resilient seeds that can resist the ravages of climate change, extreme weather, et cetera, and we have them—we know what they are, we know how to make them—and you have the abilities we now do to actually monitor the quality of soil anywhere and to remediate where necessary, you put those two things together, and that is the foundation for sustainable productive capacity.

So part of our budget is to make sure that that program starting in Africa but now also in our own hemisphere, including in Guatemala, is appropriately resourced.

Senator COONS. I look forward to talking with you further this afternoon about how we could sustain Cary Fowler's work and how we can continue to fund innovation and sustain the work of our diplomats and development professionals around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Barrasso.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, welcome. You know, yesterday the State Department issued a statement mourning the death of the Iranian president. I assume as Secretary you share that sentiment?

Mr. BLINKEN. We expressed official condolences as we have done when countries, adversaries, enemies or not, have lost leaders.

It changes nothing about the fact that Mr. Raisi was engaged in reprehensible conduct including repressing his own people for many years as a judge, and that as president and it changes not a whit about our policy.

But it is something that we have done many times in the past going back many Administrations and many decades and we do as a normal course of business.

Senator BARRASSO. Well, I do not think it should be a normal course of business. I think it is shocking that this Administration would mourn the death of the Butcher of Tehran.

I do not. He is responsible for death, rape, torture, a sworn enemy of the free world. So I think it is a terrible mistake, Mr. Secretary.

I want to move on to another issue in terms of some of the evacuations and retreats that are happening around the world. Since the deadly withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Adminis-

tration has urgently evacuated Americans at several embassies across the globe.

I had not expected to hear about this in Wyoming, but I heard about it again in Wyoming just this past weekend. Whether it is in Burma, Belarus, Sudan, Haiti, there seems to be a dangerous, growing trend of the U.S. in retreat.

The United States has been forced to draw down, evacuate, and close numerous diplomatic posts. It used to be rare to see images of U.S. troops flying to the rescue to evacuate our embassies, but it is becoming a more common sight under this Administration.

2023, U.S. troops in three helicopters airlifted 70 American employees from Sudan. 2024, in Haiti U.S. military airlifted over 30 stranded Americans.

It appears the Administration has become the Administration of evacuations. During your leadership as Secretary of State how many embassies have we had to close or evacuate?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, we are operating and living in a very dangerous world. We have Americans all over the world. We have embassies all over the world. It is important that wherever we can, we be represented and our diplomacy is able to move forward.

As has been the case many times in the past, whether it was in Venezuela in 2019, whether it was in Yemen in 2015, in Libya in 2014, in Syria in 2012, in Libya again in 2011, in Lebanon in 2006—I could go down the list—sometimes you run into crises where either an embassy has to shut down for some period of time, or you have Americans who are in harm's way.

And in the past we have as a country not often engaged in the evacuation of Americans, but we see it as our responsibility when Americans are in harm's way to try to do that.

In the instances that you have cited that is exactly what we did. You have a crisis. You have some kind of situation that runs the risk of putting at harm either our own embassy employees or Americans who may be there, we are going to make sure that job number one is protecting our people.

Senator BARRASSO. Do you see a unifying underlying factor for this terrible trend, and then how are you addressing that?

Mr. BLINKEN. I do not. I think each of these situations is distinct, and what I do see is a country that over the last 3 years has renewed its alliances, has revitalized its alliances, has created new ones so that whether it is with our core allies in Europe, in Asia or beyond, we do not have to face these situations alone.

And I see American leadership that has brought these alliances and partnerships together in ways that were not the case in recent history, and that is a great source of strength for us as we have to deal with a very challenging world.

Senator BARRASSO. So the Administration is following the withdrawal from Afghanistan, left behind weapons, ammunition, and equipment that ultimately armed the Taliban. Now that we have announced withdrawal from Niger. State Department efforts to re-establish relations and engage in diplomacy there have failed.

The government there is demanding that we leave. Our nation is withdrawing a thousand troops from two air bases where we conducted important counterterrorism missions for decades.

Media reports already indicate that Russian troops have already been deployed to these air bases where American soldiers are located.

Do you know how much American taxpayer money has the United States spent on building these bases and training the military there?

Mr. BLINKEN. We have seen, as you know, Senator, in the case of Niger a coup that took place. We sought to find a mutually acceptable way to keep our forces there so that they could pursue the counterterrorism mission that they were engaged in.

We could not reach such an agreement with the current government in Niger, and so we are, pursuant to conversations with them, pulling back our forces. If they are not wanted there, then they will not be there.

We will make, as we have, other arrangements in other places to make sure that we can conduct the necessary missions to ensure our security.

Senator BARRASSO. Do you not see risk, though, the American taxpayer funded bases ultimately ending up in the hands of the Russians, and now we are seeing the Russia's Wagner mercenary group providing military training and support—Burkina Faso, Mali, in addition to where you mentioned?

How are we countering Russia's newly created foothold in Africa?

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, there is two things. One, of course, is the military element to this, and of course, I defer to the Pentagon on the specifics of that, including what they pull out as any forces leave.

But second, I think we know that unless you have a comprehensive approach that works to try to shore up these countries economically, democratically, socially, the military peace is necessary, but it is insufficient, and we have, thanks to the work of Congress, in countries adjacent to the Sahel the Global Fragility Act, which gives us 10 year plans to help countries get on their feet in a sustainable way and that creates partnerships that allow us to sustain as necessary a military presence.

But you have very fragile countries in the Sahe,l and yes, there have been a series of nondemocratic transitions or coups in these countries, and that is simply a fact of life.

Now, I believe that we can bring much more to the table than the Russians can, for example, and when countries experience what the Russians bring to the table in terms of the exploitation of their resources, the brutalization of their people, actually more violence and more extremism, more terrorism, they tend to change their minds and have a different perspective on this.

It is unfortunate that some countries have to find out the hard way that is not the recipe to their security or their success.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you. I would add that once they find out the hard way it may be very difficult for them to extract themselves from the domination of the Russians and come back to us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for being with us today. I have appreciated your commentary on everything from the situa-

tion in Gaza to the situation in Haiti. I want to pick up where Senator Barrasso did on issues regarding Africa.

You know, I have been traveling across the continent, and the thing that always affects me is the enormity of its potential, and I know we are dealing with the crises of today.

The truth of the matter is by 2050, as you know, one out of every four human beings on the planet will be on the African continent. One out of every three working age humans will be on the African continent.

It is a continent with vast resources, vast human potential, and it is in many ways, the investments we make today will be the ones to help deal with a lot of the challenges when it comes to democracy, and unfortunately, the global competition with countries like China and Russia that do not share the world order's rules, clearly.

And I appreciated what you said to the Senator about how we are trying to deal with democratic threats.

Obviously, the backsliding in Burkina Faso, in Niger, in Mali, all in the Sahel region has me very, very concerned, and seeing the challenges that are now in Togo, Benin, Ghana, in the north of those countries including Nigeria—it is very sobering to me when it comes to the challenges of democracy.

I was very affirmed by your fiscal year 2025 budget request that includes \$411 million for democracy, rights, and governance programs in Africa. That is a sizable increase from the \$284 million allocated in fiscal year 2023.

Could you just talk a little bit to how the Administration is adjusting regional assistance programs and priorities in response to the democratic backsliding that I have discussed, and clearly, others?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you very much.

Look, exactly as you have said, Senator, and as I know you have been deeply engaged on, we see the extraordinary positive potential in Africa, not just the challenges of the moment, and for us when we have a continent that is going to have one out of every four people on Earth on that continent, when we see the fastest growing populations on Earth—before COVID actually the fastest growing economies as you know—we want to make sure that we are supporting that, and particularly making sure that young people with growing populations have positive outlets and positive opportunities.

But you are right, we also see this democratic backsliding particularly in the Sahel, and that is where we have had these recent coups.

So we have to be, and our budget reflects this, committed to longer term stability, opportunity, human development, making the investments in health and education, in economic empowerment and democratic governance in these countries.

We are working to do that. Obviously, in the countries that have been on the receiving end of coups, there are some limits that we have to abide by when it comes to the assistance we can continue to provide. But we are trying to make sure that when it comes to what is vital, we are providing it.

But then on democracy more broadly, we just came from our third summit for democracy that Korea hosted, and this was not

exclusive to Africa, but I think there is a very positive affirmative agenda for the kinds of things that we can do and are doing to try to shore up democratic governance, to try to shore up the institutions, to try to combat corruption, which saps at—

Senator BOOKER. Absolutely, and I am encouraged by that, the focus on corruption. A lot of people are focusing just on elections.

It seems that the Administration is making such a significant investment in anti-corruption efforts as well as other things that make for a vibrant democracy, and I am grateful for that.

I just want to, obviously, as you can imagine talk about Sudan. It was perhaps one of the most—the enormity of what I saw when I was at the Chad-Sudan border is like nothing I have seen before, and I have traveled to refugee camps from the Syrian-Jordanian border and to even the camps at the border in Mexico right now, but I have just never seen a scale of human suffering like that.

I am grateful for Tom Perriello and the President's appointment of a Special Envoy. But is the department providing that Special Envoy's office the kind of budget they need or the authority over any Sudan program funds to support his work?

Mr. BLINKEN. The short answer is I believe we are, and Tom Perriello has done an extraordinary job getting out of the gate fast and moving to do what we can to tackle this crisis.

I agree with you. I think, unfortunately, it is something that has not gotten the visibility that it deserves, given the amount of suffering that is going on.

You have got 8½ million displaced people. You have 18 million people in desperate need of food aid, and of course, you have the violence and atrocities that are being committed by both sides against innocent civilians.

So Senior Envoy Perriello is fully authorized, and by the way, reports directly to me and works in close collaboration with our assistant secretary for Africa to work to press for an end to the war, to make sure that we have unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, to stop the violence, to try to get a return to the democratic transition, to get a unified civilian approach to this.

We think the best vehicle for trying to move forward on that is through the Jeddah process or Jeddah negotiations.

Senator BOOKER. And getting all the players—all the players.

Mr. BLINKEN. And getting everyone around the table.

Senator BOOKER. Same table.

Mr. BLINKEN. Exactly.

Senator BOOKER. I want to just jump in with my final minute. First of all, thank you for your comments on the ICC recent actions. I think you called it wrongheaded.

I would completely agree with the Administration's comments on it. It seems to violate common sense that you have a negotiation going on that could really undermine the resolution of this, when you have a terrorist leader like Sinwar being put in—sort of equating him to a leader of—a duly elected leader in a country that actually has regular elections.

But more importantly, we know that Sinwar is doing everything he can to isolate Israel to put themselves on the same footing.

The jurisdictional issues, the challenges we have right now with trying to bring this conflict to a resolution, it seems stunning to me that they would take this action.

I want to just, though, ask you is how is the Biden administration working with Israeli, Egyptian, and humanitarian counterparts to implement a deconfliction mechanism to protect humanitarian workers and civilians? Even when a ceasefire is reached, we will need a mechanism for this—or the suffering is going to continue.

We need a humanitarian assistance at a large scale. One of the biggest concerns any caring American should have right now is the scale of the humanitarian crisis going on in Gaza.

This is not counter to dealing with Hamas, but it is urgent right now. The levels that have been mentioned by some of my colleagues are just—the scale of the human suffering there is stunning—the lack of medical provisions, the lack of food.

And so there has to be a more coordinated effort amongst the Administration to work with Israel, Egypt, and other humanitarian counterparts to make sure that, ceasefire or not, we have the mechanisms to get aid there.

The CHAIRMAN. I would ask that you give a brief response.

Mr. BLINKEN. Simply put, there is an intensely coordinated effort to work to do just that, and the envoy—it had been Ambassador David Satterfield. Now it is Lise Grande, deeply experienced in these matters, working this every single day to do three things: To make sure that we have the aid that is getting in and the appropriate crossings—land, sea, air—to get it in; second, to make sure that once it gets in, it is effectively distributed to the places and people who need it; and third and related to that, having effective deconfliction so that the humanitarians who have to move things around are not endangered as we have seen.

And there I think there—progress has been made on having this deconfliction and coordination at a sort of 10,000 foot level. But where we continue to have problems is at the tactical or unit level—that is, individual military units that have not adequately gotten the instructions that they need to have a convoy go through.

So we are working intensely to get clear, protected corridors, clear times where there is no doubt and no ambiguity about people moving humanitarian assistance to the people who need it, among other things, as well as better real time communications between those who are providing assistance and those who are on the ground engaged in combat.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Mr. Secretary, it is great to have you before the committee. I recognize that there are many pressing concerns that require your attention and your time these days.

At the same time, I believe that we have the wherewithal, we have the resources, to pursue our national interests globally including in Burma, and that is what I would like to ask you about.

It has been concerning to read and hear reports of bureaucratic delays to American support to opponents of the junta in Burma, support authorized and in fact required by Congress in the Burma Act.

Secretary Blinken, you have broad authority and sufficient funds, by my reckoning, to distribute nonlethal aid to armed groups and to Burmese society—items like drones and communications equipment, for example, that could save countless innocent lives.

Why has this aid not been fully allocated and disbursed?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I would welcome sort of coming back to you on that in detail because I am not aware of particular delays.

Certainly, our intent and my intent is to make sure that we are taking advantage of the act, and taking advantage of it in a way that allows us to robustly support both the democratic opposition and ethnic groups, to bring them together in a unified program, to provide them the assistance that they need and the support that they need even as we are putting pressure on the regime through sanctions.

So if there are specific things, I welcome learning them and working with you on that.

Senator YOUNG. OK. And I am grateful for that. I will take you up on that myself, my team, and we will stay in touch with the committee more broadly.

One concern I have is that the department has, perhaps, made a legal determination that because some nonlethal assistance could conceivably be considered dual use it could not be provided.

So I would want to know if that were, indeed, the case how we would square that with the enormous military assistance that Russia and China have been giving the junta.

Why do I not move on to some AI discussions that have made news recently? Last week, U.S. officials, including State's acting special envoy for critical and emerging technology, met with Chinese officials to discuss artificial intelligence governance.

Where do you see China's goals for AI governance differing from our own, and how are we confronting the difference in our diplomacy?

Mr. BLINKEN. So when it comes to AI and when it comes to China a couple of things worth citing.

First, as you may have noted, we got the first resolution through the U.N. General Assembly with wide support including even China on questions of AI governance and in particular the importance of trying to use AI to advance sustainable development goals to meet the needs of people around the world, and in that certain basic principles about how AI should be used that very much reflect our views.

And to the extent that we can get other countries signed on to those principles to maximize benefits, minimize any of the potential harms of AI, that is a good thing.

We have also gotten strong support around the world on how to think about the use of AI in autonomous weapons. I think those are very important guidelines that, hopefully, countries will be bound by including China.

And then more specifically, Senator, on China we thought it is important irrespective our profound differences across the board to at least be talking about how we each respectively see AI particularly when it comes to questions of safety and security, because we know the extent to which this can be used for grievous ill, not just for benefit.

And so this is a good way of at least getting a better understanding of how China is looking at this and sees this, sharing the way that we see it and seeing if as, you know, in the past we have had—when it came, for example, to arms control during the cold war, maybe there are avenues for getting agreements on use and not misuse of artificial intelligence.

But right now this is just a very broad conversation about how we respectively see AI and its development.

Senator YOUNG. I will just state and then move on with an additional question or two. I think it is fine to talk and engage in these sorts of broad discussions, and we may, indeed, come to terms on something we did not expect to come to.

I think it is equally as important to work with our closest allies and partners to see how we can harmonize our existing standards or evolving standards, and then since we share certain core values that will give us leverage at the negotiating table.

Mr. BLINKEN. You are a hundred percent right and that is what we have done. We have been working through the G-7 in particular to try to move out on basic principles, and hopefully, build out from there.

Senator YOUNG. Yes. Relatedly, today South Korea hosts the second AI safety summit after last year's summit at Bletchley Park. What role do you see the safety summit playing in the overall AI governance debate?

Mr. BLINKEN. I think these summits can help establish norms, rules, understandings when it comes to safety that could prove invaluable.

The more we can develop a consensus around what these norms and standards and rules should be, the more we or like minded countries are in the driver's seat, the more effective we are going to be in making sure that AI is used for good and we minimize its use for bad.

Senator YOUNG. And for those who are watching trying to get clarity on the division of labor within our own Government on this topic, what is the diplomatic role that you see the department taking in consultation with Commerce following Secretary Raimondo's announcement of an international network of AI safety institutes?

Mr. BLINKEN. We are working in very close coordination with Commerce on this, and we both have leadership roles to play, and we have organized our department accordingly, and as you know and I appreciate, supported—we established for the first time a bureau in the department for cyber and digital policy as well as having an envoy for emerging technology, and we have got the talent at the department to make sure that we have the necessary expertise so that we can play the necessary diplomatic role around the world in trying to align other countries with our vision for the way forward on AI.

But of course, Commerce has an absolutely vital role to play—a lead role to play, particularly when it comes to engaging the private sector and we are fully partnered on that.

Senator YOUNG. Well, I anticipate a lot of future conversation and focus from this committee as it relates to the harmonization of standards, standards development, and ensuring that the standards that prevail and predominate around the world are standards

that embed our values on privacy and openness and transparency and human rights and so forth.

So thank you for your work in the early stages of what might be characterized as a revolution in AI technology.

Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BLINKEN. Can I just add one quick thing to this, Senator?

Senator YOUNG. Yes.

Mr. BLINKEN. I just want to really applaud your leadership broadly in this area, because the work that you have done, the leadership that you showed particularly on the CHIPS and Science Act, has given us a much stronger hand to play around the world as the United States, make sure that we continue to have the leading technology, the leading industries, and thus are in a stronger position to actually shape those norms, rules, and understandings. A lot of that does go to CHIPS and Science.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We all thank Senator Young for his leadership. He has educated all of us on AI.

Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Blinken, before I start I just want to acknowledge the medical and humanitarian workers who need the secure safe access to provide badly needed care, Israeli-Americans including Hersh Goldberg-Polin who remains hostages of Hamas, the over 100 other hostages who remain unaccounted for or trapped by terrorists in Gaza, and the tens of thousands of lives of Palestinians, Israeli, American, Jordanian, Thai—the list is long and overwhelming—already lost to the latest tragic conflict in the Middle East.

My staff and I have relied heavily on the department's close support and collaboration to advocate for Illinoisans and others in Gaza, and I expect we will need to continue to work closely together to provide assistance and ensure oversight and accountability of the situation.

So I want to express my appreciation for all of the department staff for working around the clock with me and my team.

My first question has to do with ASEAN. It goes to something we have discussed here last year, the need for sustained strong investments in our relationships with allies and partners in Southeast Asia, and I applaud the elevation of the U.S.-ASEAN relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership last year and the increases in resources for the U.S. mission to ASEAN.

But as I said at the opening of the new U.S.-ASEAN center in December, China continues to increase its engagement and gain in popularity in the region, and there is so much more that we can do, and that includes showing up. High level participation at ASEAN summits and ministerial meetings is no longer a nice to have option. It is a must do.

I am still hearing about Indonesia's deep disappointment over last year's ASEAN summit, and I am sure you are as well.

In this chair year for Laos are we doing enough to support Embassy Vientiane and through them the host government in carrying out successful ASEAN meetings, and can you commit to high level participation in the upcoming ministerial and ASEAN summit?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Senator.

And I, look, fully agree with you, and I believe the answers to both questions are yes and yes. We are determined to build on what has already been a deeply strengthened partnership and relationship between the United States and ASEAN including the President hosting, as you know, a special summit with ASEAN here in Washington, my own engagement with ASEAN, and going forward, our support both for Laos as it is in the chair to do what we can to help it succeed in its chairmanship and also, yes, be present.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I also want to touch on internal reforms you have led at State every year and especially in an election year. The strength of our republic depends on resilient institutions.

So I want to commend the critical work of modernizing and strengthening the State Department itself. Important progress has been made, but when it comes to physical accessibility at department facilities, it has been my experience that there is still a lot of work to do.

The lack of basic accommodations like ramps and working buttons to open heavy security doors are still serious obstacles to the full participation of persons with disabilities, whether they are employees who need accommodations for themselves or for family members who would join them abroad or our counterparts and guests.

So in last year's State authorization I included a requirement for the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations to report on accessibility at overseas diplomatic missions and estimate the costs of making our facilities usable by persons with disabilities.

Will that report be delivered on time next month, and do you have any insight into what has been learned through the assessments so far?

And can you speak more broadly to what the department is doing to ensure employees receive the accommodations they need when they need them through a streamlined and common sense process?

Mr. BLINKEN. In short, Senator, I am committed to that. We are committed to that. I want to come back to you on the timing of the report to make sure that it is on time, or if it is not why not. So I will come back to you on that.

We have a request for an additional \$11.5 million in the budget for bolstering accessibility in the department and in our facilities. It is something that I take very seriously, and of course, there is physical accessibility, which is critical.

We are also doubling down on efforts with technology to make sure that we have the right technology in the right hands. I think we have made real progress on that. But as always more can and should be done.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Mr. Secretary, staffing and retention continue to be challenges, so I would like to use the rest of my time to speak in more detail about that, including what you have done to address the perennial challenge of employment for Foreign Service employees.

Late last year I helped introduce the Readiness Act to support Federal employees who are relocating to join their spouse on an official assignment. It would require Federal Government agencies to

make the maximum effort to retain them by simply allowing telework or transfer, or as a last resort, a period of leave without pay status.

Would you say that current policies at State support this type of common sense flexibility so that a civil servant is not needlessly faced with a choice of either stay with their family on a overseas deployment when the spouse is being sent to represent our Nation overseas or keep the job and continue their public service career?

Mr. BLINKEN. We are very much working in that direction, and I think we have made progress. Again, still more to do.

We also have the family service—the Foreign Service Families Act, excuse me, that we are working to implement to create greater flexibilities, greater opportunities for family members.

We have more and more people who are now serving as eligible family members. We have greater flexibilities for people to make sure that they are able to continue their employment as a spouse or partner when they are overseas, and I think that is part of an ongoing effort to improve those opportunities and to support families, because we know that if we want to not only attract but retain the best people in the department, we have to make sure that we are also providing the support they need for their families. Otherwise, they will do something else—go somewhere else.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Can you speak to the importance of being able to pay competitive rates to local nationals who work at embassies?

I have heard this at many of our embassies as I have traveled, and it is not limited to a particular region. I mean, I heard it in Europe. I have heard it in Asia where it is often very hard to maintain quality local staff because they cannot be paid at a rate that is competitive, and even though they want to stay with us and they are very loyal. Can you speak to the challenges in your budget?

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes, that is correct, and I think it is important to start with this. Literally, the heart of our enterprise, the State Department, are locally employed staff.

About two-thirds of the State Department employees are locally engaged staff. Our embassies cannot function without them, and not only do they fill vital functions in the embassies, they are also the most extraordinary connectivity between our embassies and the countries in which we are engaged.

In so many countries the local staff has borne the brunt of global inflation, and trying to keep pace with that in countries around the world that are not doing as well as the United States has been a challenge. And you are right, it is in many regions; it is not in any one place.

We have taken steps to address this, first, for a number of people to try to deal with the impact of that and then just coming out of COVID, which was so devastating for so many, one time increases in their compensation.

Second, we have looked at the way we assess compensation, and we have tried to bring in more criteria so that we better take into account what the actual cost of living is in a given country, not simply a sort of equation to someone in a similarly situated job.

So that is now coming into effect. We have worked to budget in including in this budget a guaranteed 2 percent increase every year

so people can see that they will have sustained support, and of course, there are other one time measures that we are looking at to help people.

But the bottom line is we have to do this. We need to do this if we are going to sustain our missions, and the budget reflects that.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you have presided over the worst foreign policy disaster of modern times. When Joe Biden became President he inherited peace and prosperity in the world.

We now have two simultaneous wars waging, the worst war in Europe since World War II, and the worst war in the Middle East in 50 years.

Both, I believe, were caused by this Administration's consistent weakness, and indeed, your foreign policy is precisely backward from what a rational American foreign policy should be.

To our friends and allies, this Administration has consistently undermined, weakened, and attacked them. And to our enemies this Administration has shown constant appeasement, and indeed, has flowed billions of dollars to the enemies of America who want to kill us.

Senator Barrasso asked you about Abraham Raisi. Your State Department put out a statement sending condolences for his death.

Mr. Secretary, is the world better today now that Raisi is dead?

Mr. BLINKEN. Given the horrible acts that he engaged in both as a judge and as president, to the extent he can no longer engage in them, yes, the Iranian people are probably better off.

Senator CRUZ. You did not say that in your statement, did you?

Mr. BLINKEN. I believe that we did, and certainly, our spokesperson—

Senator CRUZ. Today the United Nations is flying their flag at half-staff to mourn the death. Would you agree that it is utterly disgraceful for the United Nations to be mourning the death of the Butcher of Tehran?

Mr. BLINKEN. We are, certainly, not mourning his death. As I said, we expressly—

Senator CRUZ. Would you agree it is disgraceful for the U.N. to be?

Mr. BLINKEN. I will look at what they have done. We, certainly, would not do that.

Senator CRUZ. What they have done is flown the flag at half-staff. Is that disgraceful?

Mr. BLINKEN. We would not do that. We would certainly find that—

Senator CRUZ. And I would note that is the absence of American leadership.

All right. Let us shift. The *Washington Post* on May 11 wrote an article.

I am going to read the opening paragraph. "The Biden administration working urgently to stave off a full scale Israeli invasion of Rafah is offering Israel valuable assistance in an effort to persuade it to hold back, including sensitive intelligence to help the Israeli

military pinpoint the location of Hamas leaders and find the group's hidden tunnels, according to four people familiar with the U.S. offers.”

Is that paragraph accurate?

Mr. BLINKEN. Exactly the opposite. First of all, no one has done more to defend Israel than Joe Biden.

Senator CRUZ. Is that paragraph accurate?

Mr. BLINKEN. Let me finish if I may, please.

He was there right after.

Senator CRUZ. I am not interested in a campaign speech. I have limited time. Is the paragraph in the *Washington Post* accurate?

Mr. BLINKEN. As you read it, no. To the contrary, we are providing everything we possibly can to Israel to help them find—

Senator CRUZ. So the four sources that briefed the *Post*, and by the way, briefed multiple other media outlets, they were lying?

Mr. BLINKEN. Absolutely.

Senator CRUZ. So—all right. So that—does the Administration—did the Administration offer to provide the locations of senior Hamas leaders to Israel if they did not invade Rafah?

Mr. BLINKEN. That is, again, totally misleading and wrong. Here is what we have said and here is what we are doing. We have said that there is a better way to deal with the challenge that—

Senator CRUZ. I am not interested in a speech.

Mr. BLINKEN. If you do not want to hear my answer—

Senator CRUZ. Did you offer the location of senior Hamas officials if they did not invade Rafah? That is a yes or no.

Mr. BLINKEN. If we—no. If we had the locations, of course, we would provide them irrespective.

Senator CRUZ. So this statement—you are saying the *Post* got it totally wrong, it is utterly false, and anyone who said to the contrary was lying and perjuring themselves—

Mr. BLINKEN. That statement is incorrect. We have done and we will continue to do everything we can to, if we can do it, develop the information and share the information. I wish we had it.

Senator CRUZ. Does the Administration have intelligence on the locations of Hamas officials that you have not shared with Israel?

Mr. BLINKEN. No.

Senator CRUZ. Does the Administration have the locations of Hamas terror tunnels that you have not shared with Israel?

Mr. BLINKEN. No.

Senator CRUZ. OK. So then your position is that this story is an utter and complete lie—

Mr. BLINKEN. As you have read it to me, Senator, it is not—it is not accurate. It does not reflect the facts.

Senator CRUZ. And we are not interested in playing word games. I have asked you very directly. You are saying there is not a single Hamas leader that you know about that you or the Administration has offered, we will tell you where they are if you do not invade Rafah?

Mr. BLINKEN. That is correct.

Senator CRUZ. What have you offered them not to invade Rafah?

Mr. BLINKEN. We have offered them nothing not to invade Rafah except a plan to deal more effectively with Rafah—

Senator CRUZ. OK. So your testimony under oath is you have offered them nothing not to invade Rafah. I find that very hard to believe, but I just want to understand what your testimony is.

Mr. BLINKEN. I will be very clear. We have told them, we have been engaged in a long conversation with them about the most effective way to deal with the problem we agree must be dealt with at the crossing at Rafah.

Senator CRUZ. They are quite aware you disagree with their plan to kill the Hamas terrorists—

Mr. BLINKEN. That is absolutely—

Senator CRUZ [continuing]. Because you and the President have vocally said it.

Mr. BLINKEN. That is absolutely—

Senator CRUZ. To be clear, your State Department on the morning of October 7 sent out a tweet telling Israel not to engage in military retaliation. I called you out at 3 o'clock in the morning and you deleted that tweet.

The next day you personally on October 8 sent a tweet saying you had spoken with the Turkish foreign minister, and Israel should not retaliate. From the very beginning the Biden administration has consistently at every stage told Israel—and by the way, when I called your tweet out you deleted it again. At every stage you have been telling Israel do not kill the terrorists, and that has been from day one.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I was in Israel 5 days after October 7. I have been there seven times since. No one, starting with President Biden, has done more to make sure they have what they need to defend themselves from Hamas to deal with the threat that Hamas poses to make sure—

Senator CRUZ. With all due respect that that is—

Mr. BLINKEN. No. That is simply wrong.

Senator CRUZ. That is ludicrous. That is ludicrous. Why did—why have you cut off weapons to Israel then?

Mr. BLINKEN. We have not cut off weapons to Israel. In fact, as you know well, starting many years ago President Biden was at the heart of the MOU that led to Israel having a 10 year guaranteed supply of assistance when it—which is very important—

Senator CRUZ. When you became Secretary—when you became Secretary of State how much oil was Iran selling a day?

Mr. BLINKEN. I will have to come back to you on any numbers. I do not have the numbers.

Senator CRUZ. You do not know. That does not surprise me you do not know. It was about 300,000. How much oil is Iran selling today?

Mr. BLINKEN. We have applied sanctions against more than 200 entities that are engaged in petro chemicals.

Senator CRUZ. How much oil is Iran selling today? How much oil—

Mr. BLINKEN. You can tell me. I am sure you know.

Senator CRUZ. Do not filibuster.

Mr. BLINKEN. I am not filibustering.

Senator CRUZ. How much oil are they selling today? Do you know?

Mr. BLINKEN. You tell me. You tell me.

Senator CRUZ. Apparently you do not know. So you do not know how much they were selling. It was 300,000. Today they are selling about 2 million barrels a day.

Let me ask you—

Mr. BLINKEN. And given the sanctions, given the export controls, given the other controls we have put on, the cost of doing that, the evasion that they have to engage in which we are trying to—

Senator CRUZ. They made about \$80 billion. Let me ask you another question. I am running out of time.

So I am not interested in speeches. Let me ask you this. How many ghost fleet ships did Iran have in November 2020?

Mr. BLINKEN. We have sanctioned more than 200 of those—

Senator CRUZ. It is a question. I am not—how many did they have?

Mr. BLINKEN. The total number? I cannot tell you what it had in 2021. I will come back to you with that. But we—

Senator CRUZ. The number was about 70. How many do they have today?

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes. We have blocked about—we have blocked about 50 of them.

Senator CRUZ. OK. Let us see how effective you are. How many do they have today?

Mr. BLINKEN. As I said, we have blocked about 50.

Senator CRUZ. How many do they have today?

Mr. BLINKEN. You tell me. I am sure you—

Senator CRUZ. They have about over 400. Look, this Administration desperately wants a new Iran deal. You have been showering cash on Iran from day one, and understand the \$6 billion you were asked about is the tip of the iceberg.

By refusing to enforce oil sanctions we have seen Iran's oil sales go from 300,000 barrels a day when you got into office to over 2 million barrels a day today. That is \$80 billion.

Ninety percent of Hamas's funding comes from Iran in a very real sense. This Administration, you and President Biden, funded the October 7 attacks by flowing \$100 billion to a homicidal, genocidal regime that funded those attacks.

Mr. BLINKEN. That statement is profoundly wrong.

Senator CRUZ. Why?

Mr. BLINKEN. I am not even going to humor it. I think it is a disgraceful statement.

Senator CRUZ. Why?

Mr. BLINKEN. We have gone at Iran repeatedly with more than 600 sanctions applied against different—

Senator CRUZ. Then why are they selling 2 million barrels a day as compared to 300,000?

Mr. BLINKEN. They are working hard to do what they can to get around the sanctions. The cost—the cost of doing that business had gone up dramatically.

Senator CRUZ. So just the prior administration was—had tools you did not have? They were more effective? Or maybe they just were not desperate to cut a deal with Iran.

Mr. BLINKEN. And we continue every single day to go at them.

Senator CRUZ. You are refusing to address the facts.

Mr. BLINKEN. I am not.

Senator CRUZ. Then why are they selling 2 million barrels a day?

Mr. BLINKEN. Because they are determined to try to do that. We are determined to cut them off.

Senator CRUZ. They were not determined when Trump was President?

Mr. BLINKEN. They were determined, and of course, unfortunately, we also had their nuclear program in a box. No fissile material being produced.

Senator CRUZ. OK. You are not answering the question. You are filibustering another topic.

Mr. BLINKEN. I am not filibustering.

The CHAIRMAN. You get the last word. You get the last word.

Senator CRUZ. You funded our enemies, and you undermine our friends, and the world is much, much more dangerous as a result, and Americans are at greater jeopardy because of it.

Mr. BLINKEN. In fact, we have brought more countries together. We have stronger allies——

The CHAIRMAN. Let me——

Mr. BLINKEN [continuing]. Stronger partnerships and stronger engagement from countries around the world to deal with a very dangerous world than we had. We were alone. We are not anymore, and America is leading those efforts.

Senator CRUZ. Remember the Abraham Accords?

Mr. BLINKEN. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me just break you two apart for a second, if I might.

Secretary Blinken, thank you very much for your patience with our committee.

I want to complete this hearing where I started, and that is a thank you to you for restoring America's global leadership, and President Biden.

What you have done to strengthen the transatlantic partnership is incredible. I saw that first hand at the Munich Security Conference as our allies recognized the importance of the Biden administration and our Secretary of State, and restoring confidence that America's word meant something where it was unclear 4 years prior to that.

That was indispensable in our campaign to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty. That transatlantic partnership that was restored by the Biden administration was absolutely essential.

The leadership globally goes well beyond just the transatlantic partnership. I was pleased to represent the United States at COP-28, saw what happened when I was in Bonn, Germany, when President Trump withdrew America's participation in the climate summits and talks.

America's leadership made a huge difference in a very positive commitment to deal with the threat against our globe on climate, and I applaud the Biden administration and the State Department for the work that it did in making that conference so successful.

And let me just talk a moment about Iran. Iran's threat is real. But the way that the Biden administration and you have answered that, by after the attack on October 7 showing America's strength in the region to prevent an escalation of the conflict that I think

we all thought was going to happen any day, that was extraordinary leadership.

And as you pointed out in this hearing, and I just really want to underscore that, your challenges to contain Iran were made so much more difficult by the withdrawal from the nuclear agreement where we lost our eyes on the ground to see what was going on in Iran and limits on Iranian enrichment so—while Iran was in compliance with the agreement.

All that made the challenges so much more severe. But I think you are on the right path for Israel that recognizes that, yes, there is no future for Israel or the Palestinians with Hamas, and we have facilitated working with Israel to make sure that threat is eliminated.

But the security for Israel will not be solved on the battlefield. The only way there is going to be lasting peace in the Middle East is if there is a genuine path forward for the Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side in peace, recognizing each other's security, and that means moving forward with normalization so that we can get the normalization of the countries in the region.

And by the way, you showed, as you pointed out in April, that the security against the Iranian threat can be much more effective with the partnerships in the region working with Israel than just the military response to Iranian terrorist supported actions.

So I just really want to go on record to thank you for your extraordinary service to our country and to applaud the Biden administration for restoring America's leadership.

That certainly worked in our national security interests and has made such a valuable contribution to so many countries that need America's support in order to defend against attacks to their own democratic institutions, and your service has made a huge difference in that regard.

Mr. BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, can I just say, first of all, I am grateful for those words, but as might be said, right back at you.

I am not sure if I will have the opportunity to appear before this committee for the pendency of this Congress, but I just want to say that your chairmanship of the committee, your leadership of the committee, but even beyond that your leadership in Congress and as a Senator has been both exemplary and exceptional, exemplary in making sure that our values to the best of our ability remain at the heart of our foreign policy and our engagement around the world, but also in helping to provide some of the most critical tools that we have to actually ensure that that can happen.

And I deeply appreciate the collaboration we have had as you have been chairman and I have been in this role. You have been—you are an immense credit not only to this institution but to the country that we both love, and I thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you. I started my career in the Senate being helped by you, and we will continue to work together through my last year in the U.S. Senate. So thank you very much.

The record of the committee will remain open until the close of business on Thursday. For questions that may be submitted we would ask that you would try to get those responses back as quickly as possible.

And with that, the hearing will be adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:14 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF MR. ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. I have been closely following the political situation and unrest in Georgia as a consequence of the foreign agents law, passed by the Georgian Parliament on May 14. It is clear that the Georgian Dream party is intent on changing Georgia's longstanding policy in advancing Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. What consequences will be imposed on the Georgian government what groups of individuals will be targeted in the Georgian Parliament overrules President Zourabichvili's veto?

Answer. The United States has been clear with Georgian authorities both publicly and privately about our concerns related to the ruling party's anti-democratic actions, including the reintroduction of the law on foreign influence, as well as false accusations against the United States that call into question our longstanding partnership. If the law moves forward out of conformity with EU norms, we are prepared to impose measures on those responsible for these actions.

Question. What measures will be put in place to ensure that the United States can support free and fair elections in Georgia in October, given the evolving restrictions placed on civil society organizations?

Answer. The United States strongly supports free and fair elections in Georgia that meet international standards. We support independent oversight of electoral processes to safeguard the integrity of the 2024 parliamentary election, and to work with the Central Election Commission and Georgian organizations to improve electoral administration and promote a level-playing-field. Department officials are also encouraging authorities to promptly investigate any allegations of misuse of administrative resources, voter intimidation, and other election-related misconduct.

Question. Western Balkans: I continue to remain concerned about the troubling political dynamics in the Western Balkans, despite increased efforts by the United States to support democratic reforms and hold bad actors to account. I am especially concerned about the situation in the North of Kosovo. This year, I secured language in the fiscal year 2024 SFOPS report which would require the Secretary of State to consider conditioning funds to Serbia and Kosovo if no progress is made to implement the path to normalization. Can I receive your assurance that you will consider conditioning of funds toward both Kosovo and Serbia if a determination is made that there has been insufficient progress toward normalization?

Answer. We remain committed to security, stability, and prosperity in the Western Balkans and to the vision of Kosovo as a sovereign, multiethnic democracy. Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, including eventual mutual recognition, is a priority policy goal for the United States. Our assistance supports these goals. We will consider all available tools in encouraging these countries to advance the normalization of their relations, including conditioning foreign assistance.

Question. Western Balkans: The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is reaching a crisis point. What contingencies are in place to account for a possible rapid deterioration in the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Answer. We have been working with our European partners to prevent further deterioration in the security situation. We will continue to use sanctions when the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is threatened, individuals engage in anti-Dayton activities, or BiH's democratic institutions are undermined. We support a robust EUFOR presence to defend the Dayton Peace Agreement and maintain security, and support the use of Bonn Powers to strengthen the state of BiH; weaken ethnonationalist political forces; and combat corruption.

Question. Ukraine: What more can be done to support Ukraine's critical infrastructure amid continued attacks from Russia?

Answer. Russia continues its unprovoked attacks on Ukraine's energy and other critical infrastructure to undermine morale and economic activity. Air defense is crucial to protecting Ukraine's critical infrastructure assets from Russian attacks. Investments in the restoration and protection of critical infrastructure can also improve the resilience of Ukraine's infrastructure. We are working with allies and

partners to provide air defense interceptors and other equipment that will help Ukraine protect its civilians and critical infrastructure, including with G7+ partners for critical energy infrastructure.

Question. Ukraine: Given the challenges in passing the recent national security supplemental, how is the Department of State adjusting its stakeholder engagement strategy with Members of Congress to ensure that strong bipartisan support is sustained when another national security supplemental is needed? How long you anticipate that this current supplemental funding package will last?

Answer. The Department of State is committed to engaging Congress in an effective manner on our shared priorities. Since October, we have ramped up engagement with members and staff in Washington, and Embassy Kyiv has hosted an increasing number of congressional visitors. We are committed to having a sustainable partnership by actively briefing Congress on the strategic importance and effectiveness of continued support. We anticipate the current supplemental funding package will last approximately six to 12 months, depending on the pace of developments and reforms.

Question. Ukraine: How does the Black Sea security strategy factor into supporting Ukraine's economic recovery, specifically in ensuring that the Black Sea is open for trade and transportation which is critical for Ukraine's recovery?

Answer. A Black Sea region that is secure, prosperous, interconnected, and free from threats of military aggression, economic coercion, and malign influence will pave the way for Ukraine's economic recovery and sustainment. In particular, freedom of movement on the Black Sea will ensure trade opportunities and advance Ukraine's broader economy. As part of the Black Sea strategy, we are working to strengthen regional security cooperation in support of this goal.

Question. Ukraine: What is the Department of State's strategy for executing funds from the national security supplemental?

Answer. The National Security Supplemental enables continued American leadership to address Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. Our team is targeting supplemental funding where most needed. We outlined strategic priorities in the spend plans submitted pursuant to the Ukraine Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, and the strategies required by section 7046(d)(1) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2024 (Division F, Public Law 118-47) and section 504 of the fiscal year 2024 USSAA are being finalized.

Question. ICPD+30: This year marks the 30th anniversary of the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that transformed the international community's focus away from concerns about rapid population growth toward instead enhancing the rights and dignity of individuals. For the first time, governments—including the U.S.—acknowledged that sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential for sustainable development and women and girls' empowerment. How does this budget support the State Department's efforts to ensure that we prevent backsliding and continue work toward making the promise of ICPD a reality, including by investing in local organizations committed to expanding access to sexual and reproductive health services and defending human rights?

Answer. The President's fiscal year 2025 budget request includes \$44,500,000 under IO&P for the U.N. Population Fund in recognition of its critical role in ensuring access to reproductive health and services globally, including lifesaving interventions in humanitarian responses. The United States reaffirmed its commitment to the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action through a year-long commemoration of its 30th anniversary year. The ICPD remains foundational to achieving our multilateral goals on sexual, reproductive, and maternal health, and to advancing sustainable development.

Question. Global gag rule: For 40 years, the global gag rule has resulted in the disruption of U.S. global health programs. According to a GAO report release in 2022, the harm of the global gag rule continued to be felt even after the Biden-Harris administration rescinded the policy in an early executive action, as organizations struggle to rebuild lost partnerships, networks and programs and government and non-governmental organization stakeholders continue to experience confusion about what is permissible and cautious driven by the threat of it coming back under a future administration. This is why I lead the Global Health, Empowerment and Rights Act to permanently end the global gag rule. Can you describe for us what the State Department is doing to ensure that all partners and stakeholders under-

stand that the global gag rule is not currently in effect? How are you working to proactively rebuild partnerships and communities harmed by the global gag rule?

Answer. The Department of State continues to coordinate closely with USAID to ensure full implementation of the Presidential Memorandum on Protecting Women at Home and Abroad. Our collaboration to demonstrate the Administration's commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including policy clarification related to the rescission of the expanded Mexico City Policy, extends to our partnerships with various international organizations and U.S. Missions around the world.

Question. Afghan SIVs: I have called on the State Department under three administrations to increase the processing of Afghan Special Immigrant Visas. We provide these visas because Afghans who served alongside U.S. troops and diplomats are at risk of Taliban reprisal, so it is unconscionable that we would leave them in harm's way longer than absolutely necessary. So, I am pleased that the State Department is now processing SIV applications at a historic rate. The State Department has done its part, now Congress must too and provide the visas you need to get our allies to the U.S. How many visas are currently being issued per month? Is this rate increasing? How many visas do you anticipate will be issued in fiscal year 2024? What is your projection for fiscal year 2025? What steps are you taking to further improve the processing time?

Answer. The Department has issued 17,000 Afghan Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to principal applicants and family members through March 31. As of April 1, there were 19,000 SIV numbers remaining for principals, and we estimate the numbers allocated by Congress will be exhausted in 19 months. We continue to prioritize visa appointments and are using machine learning and data analytics to review Chief of Mission (COM) applications, enhancing efficiencies and security. We are on pace to complete COM processing for 35 percent more cases in fiscal year 2024 vs. fiscal year 2023.

RESPONSES OF MR. ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Africa: The Sahel: Over the past several months, the geopolitical landscape in the Sahel region has become increasingly complex. Several countries are now under military rule, and there is a heightened Russian presence, all of which complicate diplomatic, assistance, and counterterrorism efforts. In light of these developments, it is crucial to understand the Department's strategy for navigating these challenges. Will the Department provide the Committee with an updated strategy for the Sahel that responds to the current context?

Answer. There is a fluid situation in the Sahel. The Department continues to review the 2022 Sahel Strategy, but our principles have not changed. We remain focused on working with our African partners to address challenges and support democracy and good governance, which is the best foundation for development, social cohesion, prosperity, security, and stability across the Sahel and the African continent.

Question. Africa: The Sahel: What changes are needed to the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership to adapt to the current counterterrorism and U.S. bilateral country challenges in many parts of the Sahel?

Answer. The evolving landscape in the Sahel warrants reexamining the scope and purpose of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). Developments warranting a review include the emergence of military regimes in several TSCTP partners, the malign role played by global competitors, the threat posed to littoral West Africa by Sahel-based terrorists, and the need to ensure complementarity with other initiatives in the region like the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. We welcome discussion with Congress on the way forward.

Question. Africa: The Sahel: How are you ensuring that our diplomatic missions in the Sahel are adequately staffed to address the numerous challenges in countries facing serious security threats and military governments, many of which are increasingly aligned with Russia?

Answer. Staffing in the Bureau of African Affairs has historically lagged other bureaus. Insufficient local infrastructure, inadequate schools, health care challenges, and the remote nature of many postings in Africa are inherent barriers to full staffing. The Department has monetary and non-monetary incentives to encourage service in the Sahel, including through the Special Incentive Post program. The Department also eliminated some lower priority positions in the summer 2025 assignment

cycle to focus limited staff resources on high priority posts, such as those in the Sahel.

Question. Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): My staff have repeatedly inquired about the Department's role in the discussions and decisionmaking concerning sanctions relief for corrupt Israeli billionaire Dan Gertler. However, your Department consistently redirects us to the NSC on questions concerning the Department's involvement in this matter. Do you believe it is your responsibility and that of your staff to be responsive to the Committee on important issues involving your Department?

Answer. Yes, I believe it is our responsibility and that of my staff to be responsive to the Committee on important issues involving the Department.

Question. Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Has the State Department been involved in discussions about easing sanctions for Gertler? If so, detail their role. If not, explain the Department's absence in this crucial policy area.

Answer. The State Department has been closely involved in discussions about potential and bounded sanctions relief for Mr. Gertler, in exchange for his complete and permanent exit from corrupt involvements in the DRC. We would seek that to ensure any relief not only prioritizes long-term U.S. interests, but also advances local protections for civil society and the press. This is consistent with our partnership with the DRC government and our commitment to the Congolese people.

Question. Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Has the Department engaged in direct talks with the Government of the DRC (GDRC) or Mr. Gertler about sanctions relief? If so, specify when. If not, explain the Department's lack of involvement.

Answer. We are working to support the Government of the DRC as it endeavors to remove corrupt actors from its mining sector. As part of these efforts, we have indicated that we are open to exploring limited sanctions relief as a conduit to the complete removal of Mr. Gertler and his personal, family, and business operations from the DRC. Our discussions with the GDRC began in the Fall of 2022, and as of May 21, 2024, we have not engaged directly with Mr. Gertler. My Department looks forward to staying engaged with you and your staff on this subject.

Question. Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Is Embassy Kinshasa involved in any discussions regarding sanctions relief for Dan Gertler? If so, describe their role. If not, does this mean they are excluded from a significant aspect of our relations with the GDRC?

Answer. Embassy Kinshasa is closely involved in all internal discussions regarding sanctions relief for Mr. Gertler.

Question. Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Is it Department policy to not participate in vital sanctions relief discussions regarding corrupt businessmen under consideration for relief in a country and sector of strategic importance to the United States and its bilateral foreign policy?

Answer. The Department of State is closely involved in vital sanctions relief discussions.

Question. Africa: Liberia: Liberia and the United States have shared a "special relationship" since Liberia's founding in 1847. This enduring friendship has weathered numerous challenges. Despite this, Liberia continues to face significant challenges in development, democratic governance, and combating rampant corruption, including under newly elected President Joseph Boakai. How has the United States recalibrated its 'special relationship' with Liberia since President Boakai's election to optimize U.S. influence over crucial reforms while avoiding excessive reliance on U.S. foreign assistance and support?

Answer. Since President Boakai's election, we've recalibrated our "special relationship" by focusing on partnerships emphasizing self-reliance. We support key reforms through targeted assistance and capacity-building, while urging Liberia to take ownership of its development. This includes engaging new governance heads and offering technical assistance for tax expansion, budget transparency, and decentralization. We are also aligning USAID's strategy with Liberia's National Development Plan to ensure coordinated priorities over the next 5 years.

Question. Africa: Liberia: What role should the Department and Embassy Monrovia play in supporting U.S.-linked companies in Liberia's mining sector through commercial diplomacy?

Answer. We support U.S.-linked companies by meeting with them to understand challenges with the economic policies of the host government and engaging with

Government of Liberia stakeholders to encourage policies to improve investment climate. Our efforts include advocacy on behalf of U.S.-linked companies such as Arcelor Mittal (AML) and High-Power Exploration (HPX). Our efforts advance U.S. interests in coastal West Africa and the mining sector, support President Boakai's anticorruption priorities, and facilitate long-term economic stability in Liberia.

Question. Africa: South Sudan: Do you believe that in the next 6 months South Sudan can meet the minimal standards for democratic elections?

Answer. Consistent with U.N. Secretary General Guterres' April assessment, I believe President Salva Kiir, First Vice President Riek Machar, and other South Sudanese political leaders have collectively failed to meet the conditions for genuine and peaceful elections in South Sudan. They should urgently address deficiencies, including by protecting civic space, deploying politically neutral security forces, strengthening electoral institutions, and holding leadership dialogue to resolve outstanding election decisions.

Question. Africa: South Sudan: Should the United States support South Sudan's currently planned general elections?

Answer. Transitional government leaders should act with urgency to create conditions for a genuine and peaceful electoral process, including by protecting civic space, standing up politically neutral security forces, strengthening electoral institutions, and holding dialogue among leaders to resolve outstanding election decisions. U.S. and U.N. support should focus on promoting conditions for a genuine and peaceful electoral process.

Question. Africa: South Sudan: At what point should the United States consider no longer recognizing the legitimacy of the current leaders of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) of South Sudan, particularly President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar?

Answer. The United States recognized the then-newly independent South Sudan in 2011 and acknowledges the Revitalised Transitional Government of South Sudan, under the leadership of President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar. The country's political transition is set to expire in February 2025, following elections. The best path to securing peace in South Sudan is through genuine and peaceful elections. The goal of our policy is for the United States to be able to acknowledge South Sudan's first democratically elected leader.

Question. Central African Republic: What should be the U.S. strategy to counter Russian mercenaries in the Central African Republic?

Answer. The U.S. strategy for countering Russian influence in the Central African Republic (CAR) seeks to address the root causes of insecurity that predatory Russian actors have exploited to undercut CAR's sovereignty. Our strategy, involving close coordination with partners, focuses on strengthening democracy and governance, encouraging a sustainable peace and respect for human rights, and countering disinformation. More flexible funding (i.e., expanding Countering Russia Influence Funds for Africa) will help in executing our strategy.

Question. Sudan: Aside from the sanctions already issued by the administration, what other sanctions are you considering against Sudan's General Hemetti and the Rapid Support Forces?

Answer. While we will not preview specific actions, we will continue to consider sanctions tools under our Sudan sanctions authority (Executive Order 14098), Global Magnitsky, and other tools: to disrupt the ability of the RSF and SAF to prolong this war; impose costs on those connected to human rights abuses; and target those who would undermine efforts to achieve an end to the conflict. We have used the threat of sanctions and will consider further measures against the RSF and its leadership, including nominating them for designation at the United Nations, as appropriate.

Question. Africa: Sudan: Please provide your understanding of the scope and scale of assistance provided by the United Arab Emirates and Iran to the belligerent parties in the Sudan conflict.

Answer. We are aware of documentation by open-source media outlets, research organizations, and the U.N. Darfur Panel of Experts on the provision or sale of arms or other support by countries, including the UAE and Iran, to the belligerents in Sudan. We remain greatly concerned about any external involvement, which will only exacerbate and prolong the conflict, and risks further spreading regional instability. The Department would be happy to provide additional information in a classified setting.

Question. Africa: Sudan: How is the Department monitoring and updating you regarding the atrocities occurring daily in Sudan?

Answer. My team, including Special Envoy Perriello; Assistant Secretary Phee and others in the Africa Bureau, including the Office of Sudan Affairs in Addis Ababa; the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; and the Office for Global Criminal Justice, are regularly briefing me. This has included frequent updates on Department efforts to facilitate cease-fire talks, and on reports of abuses and atrocities.

Question. Africa: Sudan: What more can you do as the Secretary of State to increase attention to the conflict in Sudan?

Answer. My team and I are committed to raising attention and mobilizing coordinated international action to press for a cease-fire, unhindered humanitarian access, and a democratic transition in Sudan. I have consistently raised Sudan with key partners, regional leaders, and multilateral actors to ensure a coordinated international approach. I have also urged my team to increase media engagements and to speak directly to Sudanese civilians and amplify their voices.

Question. Africa: Sudan: Do you envision the Special Envoy for Sudan position to be limited to the conflict in Sudan or as one that also includes the countries recovery if and when a lasting peace is reached?

Answer. Special Envoy Perriello has a broad mandate, which would not conclude upon agreement on a cease-fire. This includes meeting the immediate and urgent humanitarian needs of the Sudanese people; harmonizing international efforts to end the conflict; preventing continued atrocities and promoting accountability; and supporting development of an inclusive pro-democracy civilian front.

Question. Africa: Sudan: Do you intend to submit a nominee to the Senate to be Special Envoy for Sudan? If so, when? If not, why not?

Answer. The President appointed Tom Perriello as the Special Envoy for Sudan consistent with section 1(j)(3) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 2651a(j)(3)), which requires submission of a notification to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The appointment may be extended consistent with section 1(j)(4) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 2651a(j)(4)). We have submitted a notification to extend his temporary assignment, consistent with section 1(j)(4).

Question. Gabon: My staff recently received a classified briefing on U.S. efforts to support Gabon's transition to democratic civilian rule. The U.S. faces challenges in responding to coups in West and Central Africa, particularly regarding the Gabonese junta's commitments to the transition and reducing reliance on China. Additionally, there is a concern about the slow decisionmaking and action by the State Department and interagency, especially when resources and personnel are involved. Flexibility and responsiveness are crucial, especially for coup responses. How can you ensure the State Department and your role within the interagency lead to faster and more responsive policy decisions and actions regarding the transition in Gabon?

Answer. The United States reaffirms our commitment to support Gabon in conducting a timely, durable transition to a democratically elected civilian government and advancing shared security interests in the Gulf of Guinea. We are taking thoughtful steps to resume our assistance following concrete actions by the transitional government toward establishing democratic rule. I am also working within the Department to enhance our resourcing and enable increased responsiveness, utilizing data and creativity to address complex and evolving challenges.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Illegal Immigration: Please describe the extent to which the governments of Mexico and the countries of northern Central America have strengthened their respective asylum systems and built institutional responses for forced internal displacement in their respective countries.

Answer. Partner governments continue to build and sustain their migration management capacities, including by expanding their asylum systems and improving the integration of asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants. Mexico remains an essential partner in providing access to international protection, including increasing its asylum processing capacity by 400 percent between 2018 and 2023, and integrating over 35,000 refugees into its labor market since 2016 through a UNHCR program. U.S. humanitarian assistance significantly supports these efforts.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Illegal Immigration: Please describe the extent to which the governments of Mexico and the countries of northern Central America

have expanded domestic pathways for legal and human migration within their respective countries.

Answer. The Mexican government allows migrant families to apply for legal status in Mexico if they have a Mexican spouse or child. In southern Mexico, border workers' cards enable people from Belize and Guatemala to temporarily work in Mexico, provided they have existing job offers. U.S. humanitarian partner, the U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR), is supporting the Mexican government's pilot program for Haitian migrants' integration into local labor markets. In Belize, the Amnesty Program offers permanent residency to qualified applicants, receiving over 13,000 applications in 2023.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Illegal Immigration: The United States has extradition treaties with Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. These treaties cover crimes that are often committed in relation to human trafficking activities sustaining the illegal migration crisis at our southwest border. Please provide an update on the number of human smugglers and traffickers extradited to the United States under these existing extradition treaties.

Answer. Extraditions are one tool in the U.S. Government toolkit to combat and prevent migrant smuggling and human trafficking. For example, in the March 2023, June 2023, and September 2023 extraditions of seven human smugglers to the United States—four from Guatemala, one from Honduras, and two from Mexico—extensive coordination and cooperation efforts between U.S. and Guatemalan, Honduran, and Mexican law enforcement authorities culminated in these criminals' successful apprehension and extraditions.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Illegal Immigration: Please describe how the proposed foreign assistance budget would incentivize the governments of Mexico and the countries of northern Central America to increase their own domestic resources to improve the security of their respective international borders and reduce illegal immigration.

Answer. We continue to engage with Mexico and the countries of northern Central America on a range of migration issues such as enforcement coordination, strengthening access to lawful pathways, and addressing root causes. The assistance we provide supports these partners in the region to build and sustain their migration management capacities, including by expanding their asylum systems and improving their abilities to integrate asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants into their countries.

Question. The proposed budget includes a request of \$4.5 million for public diplomacy campaigns to reduce illegal migration to the United States. Please elaborate on the strategies and platforms the administration will use to effectively reach and engage target audiences under this proposal. Please describe how these efforts will improve upon the evidently failed campaigns of the last 3 years.

Answer. To reduce irregular migration and encourage the use of lawful pathways, the Department will use a cost-effective, post-centered approach to regularize messaging and programming to reach target audiences. Through broadcast paid advertisement, tailored messaging, and message testing, the Department will educate target audiences on deterrent factors; emphasize the economic and social costs of irregular migration; and promote ties to home communities, including by showcasing U.S. efforts to address root causes that drive irregular migration.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Illegal Immigration: Pillar I of the July 2021 strategy for addressing root causes of migration in Central America identifies economic insecurity and inequality in the region as a push factor for illegal migration. Please describe how the budget request will promote partnership with the private sector in Guatemala to support the creation of broad-based private sector jobs in Guatemala.

Answer. Guatemala plays a key role in addressing the root causes of migration. Under Central America Forward, the U.S. Government has helped generate over \$5.2 billion in private sector commitments. In March, the Department of State held the inaugural High-Level Economic Dialogue with the government of Guatemala, including extensive participation from the private sector, to identify opportunities to spur inclusive economic growth. The budget request allows the Department to continue engaging the private sector to generate sustainable economic development.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Illegal Immigration: Please describe steps the State Department may be taking to engage the government of President Arevalo in Guatemala to prioritize reforms and other actions to strengthen the enabling environment for businesses to create jobs in the formal sector.

Answer. Under Central America Forward, the U.S. Government works in partnership with the Government of Guatemala and the private sector to strengthen the environment for business to invest and create formal jobs. In Guatemala, the Department of State held the High-Level Economic Dialogue (HLED), which was a significant step to mobilize inclusive economic growth and improve the investment climate. The HLED included discussions with the private sector, engagement on anti-corruption, and dialogue with Indigenous leaders. We are working to further advance these efforts.

Question. Please describe what impact U.S. assistance to the Haitian National Police since 2021 has had on the percentage decrease in homicides, kidnappings, and robberies in Port-au-Prince and the percentage increase of individuals that see the HNP as a service provider in lieu of gangs.

Answer. Since the assassination of President Moïse in 2021, INL significantly increased funding to support the Haitian National Police (HNP) in building an anti-gang capacity, working with communities to reduce violence, and strengthening HNP size and capacity. The HNP reported this assistance was critical to fighting back against a surge in gang attacks, including to prevent the airport from falling into gang control. USAID's citizen security program has perception polling underway. Additionally, INL's subject matter experts are working with the HNP on best practices for data collection.

Question. Please provide quantitative data measuring the following HNP-related metrics since 2021: The total number of arrested gang members and successful anti-gang operations conducted by the HNP, the establishment of a consistent HNP recruitment schedule to increase the force, a transparent budget that ensures proper resourcing of HNP units, and on corrections the percentage reductions in both pre-trial detainees and overcrowding across Haiti's corrections system.

Answer. From 2004 to May 2024, INL supported 12,994 HNP school graduates. Officers in the counter-gang unit has doubled to 135 since 2021. In April 2024, the 33rd promotion was the first class to graduate under the curriculum that was reduced from seven to 4 months. For 2023–24, the Government of Haiti budgeted roughly \$151 million for HNP operations and \$45 million for HNP investment. INL remains focused on establishing secure and humane correctional facilities and supporting efforts started by the previous Minister of Justice to reduce prison overcrowding.

Question. The Administration has pursued an Arab Gas Pipeline, providing Egyptian gas through Syria and into Lebanon as a proposal to alleviate Lebanon's energy shortage. The gas pipeline would ostensibly provide the Assad regime with an 8 percent transit fee or an in-kind payment in violation of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019. In addition, maintenance and refurbishment of the pipeline would involve sanctioned Russian entities, notably Gazprom, in violation of Russia sanctions. In the past, you have committed to brief me on Caesar and Russia sanctions compliance before issuing any comfort letter, letter of assurance, or waiver related to the Arab Gas Pipeline. Do you maintain your commitment to brief me on Caesar and Russia sanctions compliance before issuing any comfort letter, letter of assurance, or waiver related to the Arab Gas Pipeline?

Answer. Yes, my team and I remain committed to providing briefings to you and your staff. The Departments of the Treasury and State have made no final determinations to date. I understand that the parties and the World Bank are still discussing the project details. The Departments of the Treasury and State need to receive the details of the final financing terms and final contracts to be able to assess relevant sanctions implications. As I have made clear, we have not lifted or waived Syria-related sanctions.

Question. Iran: The Administration has submitted successive waivers to Iran sanctions statutes to facilitate the unfreezing of Iranian assets frozen in jurisdictions abroad. I have serious concerns that unfreezing assets allows the regime to allocate additional resources to its defense sector and terrorist proxies. I have additional concerns that adequate safeguards, assurances, and mechanisms are in place to prevent unauthorized diversions? Will you commit to consulting me before issuing a waiver to unfreeze Iranian assets in foreign jurisdictions?

Answer. We maintain a rigorous economic sanctions regime against Iran. It is longstanding U.S. policy across administrations that restricted Iranian funds, wherever they are located, can only be used for humanitarian or other non-sanctioned purposes, consistent with U.S. law. None of these restricted funds have been released to the Government of Iran. The humanitarian channels set up impose strict due diligence requirements and are only available for use by humanitarian goods

exporters who meet certain qualifications. We can provide additional details in a classified setting.

Question. Over the last 11 months, I have asked the State Department for information relating to Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley and the conditions surrounding his security clearance revocation. State has repeatedly refused my formal request for information, citing the Privacy Act. The Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, provides an exception for "... either House of Congress, or, to the extent of matter within its jurisdiction, any committee or subcommittee thereof, any joint committee of Congress or subcommittee of any joint committee." Do you agree or disagree that the nature of Mr. Malley's infractions are excluded from Congress under the Privacy Act? Please provide a detailed answer.

Answer. The Department has provided information, including certain Privacy Act protected information, regarding Mr. Malley to relevant Congressional Committees. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters. However, the Department will continue to work in good faith to be as transparent as possible with Congress.

Question. Given your longstanding personal relationship with Mr. Malley, have you been advised to recuse yourself from his investigation or other personnel matters?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. I am concerned that Mr. Malley's lapse in judgment may have negatively impacted U.S.-Iran policy or improperly influenced proximity talks with the regime. Can you confirm that the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) suspended Mr. Malley's clearance because he improperly transferred classified U.S. Government information to a personal email account and/or device that is not authorized to store such information?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. How many classified documents did Mr. Malley improperly transfer, and what were the contents? What was the highest classification of the transferred documents?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Did Mr. Malley send or attempt to send these documents to anyone who lacked the proper clearance? Were any of these individuals affiliated with the Iranian government or the Iran Experts Initiative?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. When and how did DS become aware that classified information was compromised? When did DS notify Department leadership and when did Department leadership inform the White House that Mr. Malley was suspected for mishandling classified information?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. When did DS or the FBI first contact Mr. Malley about his potential misuse of classified information? Was he truthful and cooperative with law enforcement?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Had Mr. Malley previously received any warnings about his handling of classified information before the actions that caused the Department to suspend his clearance?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Middle East/North Africa: Robert Malley: Can you confirm that a malign cyber actor gained access to Mr. Malley's personal email and/or phone?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Is the alleged cyber actor affiliated with the IRGC, Iranian military, or Iranian intelligence services?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. When and how did the cyber actor compromise Mr. Malley's account?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Did the compromise of Mr. Malley's device enable subsequent compromise of other senior officials at the State Department, National Security Council, or other agencies? How did the malign actor utilize the information obtained from Mr. Malley?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters. For questions regarding the activities of another agency, we refer you to that agency.

Question. Has the FBI or DOJ recommended any criminal charges against Mr. Malley? Is the FBI investigation still ongoing or has it been completed? What role did the Department play in supporting this investigation?

Answer. I would refer you to the Department of Justice regarding the existence or non-existence of any criminal investigations by DOJ or the FBI.

Question. Did you or any other senior administration officials at State, the White House, DOJ, or any other agency play any role in advocating for or against any criminal charges?

Answer. I would refer you to the Department of Justice regarding the existence or non-existence of any criminal investigations by DOJ or the FBI.

Question. Has the Department or any other Federal entity conducted an impact assessment of the damage to national security caused by Mr. Malley's mishandling of classified information?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters. For questions regarding the activities of another agency, we refer you to that agency.

Question. Robert Malley: What has been the impact on the administration's Iran policy? Did it reveal sensitive details about these negotiations or about other U.S. diplomatic engagement with Iran?

Answer. We remain happy to brief on our overall Iran policy and approach to confronting Iran's full range of destabilizing activities, which remains unchanged.

With respect to Robert Malley, consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Robert Malley: Did Mr. Malley's alleged infractions affect the conduct of Iran policy, to include nuclear discussions in Vienna or the public perception of those negotiations, as well as proximity talks in Oman that led to the release of Americans in exchange for loose nuclear and regional terrorism assurances?

Answer. We remain happy to brief on our overall Iran policy and approach to confronting Iran's full range of destabilizing activities, which remains unchanged.

With respect to Robert Malley, consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Have you or any other senior State Department official ever sought to reinstate Mr. Malley's security clearance or access to State Department networks or systems? If so, when, and what was the justification?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters.

Question. Middle East/North Africa: Robert Malley: If you cannot answer questions 35 through 50 in this setting, will you commit to provide a fulsome briefing in an appropriate setting?

Answer. We remain happy to brief on our overall Iran policy and approach to confronting Iran's full range of destabilizing activities, which remains unchanged. With respect to Robert Malley, consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on individual personnel security matters, and certain information being requested of the Department regarding Rob Malley is not under the Department's jurisdiction. Nevertheless, after briefing you and Chair Cardin on January 31, 2024, the Department then delivered to your staff a classified letter with certain additional details, including certain Privacy Act protected information.

Question. State Department Management and Oversight: Bix Aliu: As you know, this committee recently considered the nomination of Bix Aliu as Ambassador to Montenegro. At his hearing, I raised serious concerns about Mr. Aliu's poor leadership and the toxic workplace culture he fostered, concerns that the Majority now also seems to share given that Mr. Aliu's nomination did not advance. Remarkably, I now understand that Mr. Aliu has been appointed to chair the upcoming FS02-01 promotion panels for foreign service officers, putting him a position to potentially retaliate against whistleblowers. Secretary Blinken has claimed that one of his key priorities is addressing toxic leadership and improving leadership accountability at the Department. How is appointing an individual who has engaged in exactly this type of behavior consistent with that priority?

Answer. The Department is committed to maintaining a workplace free from harassment and retaliation. We take allegations of such behavior seriously and have established procedures for pursuing accountability, including new anti-bullying guidance. Employees selected to serve on promotion panels are vetted and monitored for adherence to policies and procedures. Foreign Service employees may submit a request for recusal of a board member they believe will not apply the precepts without bias. I have confidence in promotion board members to adhere to the highest standards.

Question. State Department Management and Oversight: Bix Aliu: What message does it send to your workforce, particularly to those officers who may now be subject to illegal retaliation from Mr. Aliu?

Answer. The Department is committed to protecting all personnel against retaliation and holding employees found to have engaged in retaliation accountable, including through disciplinary action up to and including separation where appropriate. Department employees and their managers have access to information on how to report allegations of retaliation. All Foreign Service employees also have the right to submit a request for recusal of a board member who they do not believe will be able to apply the precepts fairly and without bias in assessing their performance.

Question. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: During the most recent promotion cycle, the Department used its new "diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA)," promotion precept for the first time. Unlike the other promotion precepts, this one is not actually tied to how good you are at your job; it's linked to the degree to which you are a missionary for progressive social causes. As bad as that is, what's even worse is that we understand the Department is applying this precept retroactively. The Department's new DEIA precept is not just a recap of principles previously listed under other precepts. It establishes new goals on how employees should understand and promote these concepts. Can you confirm that the Department is retroactively evaluating candidates for promotion based on a new, ideological test?

Answer. Employees are not being retroactively graded. Fostering diversity and inclusion within the workplace was a requirement in the 2018-2022 core precepts, which were negotiated with the Foreign Service exclusive representative, the American Foreign Service Association. A distinct DEIA core precept emphasizing both internally focused DEIA and externally focused equity in foreign policy and foreign assistance started with the 2022-2023 Foreign Service rating cycle. All employees are informed of the core precepts at the start of each rating cycle.

Question. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: How is it fair to retroactively grade employees based on criteria they were not aware of at the time?

Answer. Employees are not being retroactively graded. Fostering diversity and inclusion within the workplace was a requirement in the 2018–2022 core precepts, negotiated with the Foreign Service exclusive representative, the American Foreign Service Association. A distinct Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) core precept emphasizing both internally focused DEIA and externally focused equity in foreign policy and foreign assistance started with the 2022–2023 Foreign Service rating cycle. All employees are informed of the core precepts at the start of each rating cycle.

RESPONSES OF MR. ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Given the Department of State’s recent decision to remove Cuba from the list of countries ‘not fully cooperating’ with U.S. counterterrorism efforts, despite Cuba’s designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism for providing safe harbor to terrorists, this action seems to present a troubling double standard. How do you reconcile this contradiction, and what message does it send to our allies, partners and to those who have suffered from terrorism?

Answer. The Department makes NFCC determinations annually and determined the circumstances for Cuba’s certification as a “not fully cooperating country” (NFCC) changed from 2022 to 2023. Certification as “not cooperating fully” with U.S. counterterrorism efforts is made pursuant to a separate statutory authority and criteria from State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) designations. There have been countries certified as NFCC without being designated as SSTs (e.g., Venezuela), and countries that have been designated SSTs without being certified as NFCCs (e.g., Sudan).

Question. In light of Cuba’s ongoing hostility toward the United States, its documented history of espionage activities, and the well-documented oppression of its own people (most recently seen through the brutal crackdown following the March 2024 protests), what specific actions has the Cuban regime taken to warrant such a seemingly unearned distinction?

Answer. The Department determined the circumstances for Cuba’s certification as a “not fully cooperating country” (NFCC) changed from 2022 to 2023. In August 2022, Colombia’s Attorney General announced that arrest warrants would be suspended against 17 National Liberation Army (ELN) commanders, including those whose extradition Colombia had previously requested from Cuba. Moreover, the United States and Cuba resumed law enforcement cooperation in 2023, including on counterterrorism.

Question. This move clearly damages U.S. credibility on this important issue. How does this align with the United States’ commitment to the respect of human rights and the rule of law?

Answer. U.S. policy toward Cuba focuses on support for the Cuban people, especially their human rights, fundamental freedoms, and political and economic well-being. The protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms remains a top U.S. priority in our bilateral relationship. The “not fully cooperating country” statute involves a yearly determination as to whether a country has cooperated fully with U.S. counterterrorism efforts during the preceding calendar year.

Question. In which specific areas is the U.S. Government and the Cuban regime currently cooperating in the area of counterterrorism?

Answer. The United States and Cuba entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on Law Enforcement Cooperation in January 2017. The MOU established eight technical working groups, including on counterterrorism. The associated Law Enforcement Dialogue (LED) met from 2015–2018 and resumed activity in January 2023. Counterterrorism issues are worked through the Law Enforcement Dialogue, which is an interagency led initiative.

Question. Which agency is the lead for this counterterrorism cooperation?

Answer. The Federal Bureau of Investigation leads the Counterterrorism technical working group.

Question. Do you believe the Cuban regime is an honest broker and has the same definitions of terrorism that the U.S. does?

Answer. We remain concerned about the Cuban government's published list of alleged terrorists in the United States. The Cuban government has a well-documented history of threatening and intimidating individuals who exercise their freedom of expression. We take seriously the misuse or attempted misuse of international law enforcement tools, such as INTERPOL, and we continue to increase domestic and international awareness of, build opposition to, and take effective measures against transnational repression in all its forms.

Question. What's Cuba's definition of terrorism? What's Cuba's definition of human rights? What's Cuba's definition of political prisoners?

Answer. While we will not represent or defend the Cuban government's definitions, the advancement of democracy and human rights remains at the core of our policy toward Cuba and a consistent topic of diplomatic engagement. We continue to call publicly on the Cuban government to respect the human rights of Cubans and release all unjustly detained political prisoners, including the hundreds of protestors from the July 11, 2021, demonstrations. We remain committed to promoting accountability for the Cuban government officials involved in such violations and abuses.

Question. Is the U.S. Government providing sensitive information regarding terrorism or other intelligence details to the Cuban regime?

Answer. The Department takes seriously the importance of safeguarding law enforcement information and carefully considers what information can be shared. Effective legal cooperation on law enforcement matters may on occasion include certain information sharing, such as information about fugitives or other wanted individuals, or real-time communication between the U.S. Coast Guard and Cuban Border Guard to detect illegal activities, such as human smuggling and drug trafficking.

Question. Recently, Cuban regime officials held a formal exchange with the TSA at Miami International Airport. They reportedly received privileged access to sensitive technology and areas of the airport as well. I was surprised to learn that our TSA is having such exchanges with a formally designated State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST). So now it appears there have been three formal exchanges going on with an SST by my count, this recent engagement with TSA, a U.S. Coast Guard-aided survey of U.S. port security processes, and the yearly law enforcement cooperation meeting between Cuba with the State Department. Were you aware of this exchange prior to it taking place?

Answer. Cuba is the only SST-designated country with direct flights to the United States. TSA routinely works with its Cuban counterparts to promote civil aviation security in both countries. TSA proposed this technical exchange, which we supported in the interest of airport security and U.S. national security. During the visit, Cuban officials did not access sensitive technology or systems.

Question. How many official exchanges does the Department sponsor with Cuba and other SSOTs?

Answer. The United States will continue to engage the Cuban government when those engagements advance U.S. national interests and protect U.S. national security and the security of U.S. citizens. This includes migration, civil aviation security, law enforcement cooperation, and other matters. We remain committed to briefing Members of Congress and staff on such discussions. The United States integrates advocacy for human rights and human rights protections into all interactions with the Cuban government.

Question. What kind of visas does the Department grant for these regime officials?

Answer. Visa applications are processed in accordance with the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act and an applicant is only issued a visa if they are found eligible. Foreign government officials traveling to the United States to conduct inherently governmental business may be eligible for A-1 or A-2 visas depending upon their job title and duration of their visit.

Question. Why is this administration providing information on how the U.S. conducts border and aviation security with a designated terrorist entity? How can an SST, like Cuba, use this information to harm Americans and other air travelers?

Answer. Cuba is the only country on the State Sponsor of Terrorism list with direct flights weekly to the United States. TSA is required by law to assess security measures for any country with direct flights to the United States. We will continue to regularly engage with TSA's Cuban counterparts to advance U.S. national interests, including promoting safe and secure civil aviation airports. The United States

has conducted airport security assessments in Cuba since 2003, with Cuba sending reciprocal visits to the United States.

Question. As you know, the Chinese Communist Party is intent on replacing the U.S. as the preeminent global power to re-write the international order based on their communist totalitarian world view. They employ a wide array of tools to spread their malign agenda unilaterally and through witting partners such as Russia, Iran, and now even Hamas (which they recently hosted in Beijing a day after your most recent visit). Beijing also does this via unwitting partners through predatory lending practices that force sovereign nations like Peru (which just lost a key strategic port close to Lima) to submit to their will using mechanisms such as the sham Belt and Road Initiative. How would you rate your performance, to date, on thwarting Beijing's clear agenda of global domination?

Answer. We recognize the PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capabilities to do so. Because of our work with Congress to invest in the sources of American strength, deepen cooperation with allies and partners, and compete vigorously, we are dealing with that threat from a position of strength and increasingly on our terms and making progress in support of U.S. national security goals.

Question. Yes or No. Do you recognize that Beijing is waging proxy wars against the United States and its allies via Russia and Iran?

Answer. We have been clear that the PRC is pursuing military, economic, and geopolitical preeminence in a way that challenges our vision for a free, open, secure, and prosperous international order, including through its relationships with Russia and Iran. Beijing cannot claim to be a neutral actor in Russia's war against Ukraine while providing Russia diplomatic support and rebuilding Russia's defense industrial base, nor is it doing enough to use its influence to pressure Iran and its proxies to cease destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

Question. Yes or No. Do you agree that a failure to enforce Biden's March 2022 red line (delivered during a video call with Xi Jinping) against Chinese "material support" for Russia's war in Europe has invited greater aggression in that theater and other theaters?

Answer. President Biden made clear there would be consequences if the PRC supported Russia's war effort in Ukraine. The United States has already sanctioned and listed nearly 200 PRC-based entities that have provided dual-use material support to Russia's defense industrial base. President Biden and I have made clear to the PRC that if it does not change course, we and our allies and partners will continue to take action.

Question. Yes or No. Are you advocating for substantial consequences upon China for their "material support" to Russia? If so, what specific consequences?

Answer. The United States has already sanctioned and listed nearly 200 PRC entities for providing support to Russia's defense industrial base. We continue to make clear to the PRC that the United States will continue to take action if this support does not stop. We work closely with allies and partners in Europe and around the world to speak out against the PRC's support to Russia's war effort and build consensus to impose consequences for the PRC's support to Russia's war effort.

Question. In light of the agreement to remove sanctions on the Chinese Ministry of Public Security's Institute of Forensic Science, previously involved in the Uyghur crisis, based on the PRC's pledge to more fully collaborate on fentanyl issue, what tangible outcomes have resulted from this concession?

Answer. While the U.S. Government believes that the PRC should take additional actions to address the flow of precursor chemicals, as a result of U.S. diplomatic engagement, the PRC has taken initial steps to curb illicit sales of fentanyl precursor chemicals, issued a notice to its domestic chemical industry on applicable regulations and enforcement actions, scheduled more than 40 substances, including three fentanyl precursors, and arrested an individual based on U.S. law enforcement information. We continue to press the PRC to take sustained actions.

Question. Beijing appears to be unimpressed with the piecemeal sanctions the administration has applied against obscure Chinese companies supplying Russia, judging by the skyrocketing Chinese support for Russia's war machine since General Secretary Xi's Kremlin visit in March 2023. What is your plan, if any, to materially impose costs on Beijing for its continuing disregard for Biden's redline?

Answer. Beijing has taken note of our sanctions; we continue to be clear at the highest levels that the United States will continue to take action if the PRC does not stop its support to Russia's defense industrial base. The United States has already sanctioned and listed nearly 200 PRC entities for providing support to Russia's defense industrial base, and we will not hesitate to impose additional measures as necessary. We also work closely with allies and partners in Europe and around the world to build consensus to impose consequences for the PRC's support to Russia's war effort.

Question. The Biden Administration's engagement strategy with China has not produced sufficient positive results, particularly with regard to the continuing threat to allies and partners such as Taiwan, the Philippines, and India, as well as its support for Russia, Iran, and their proxies. This administration has spent an inordinate amount of time and political capital trying to engage Beijing on a whole host of issues—but it's not at all clear what this strategy has gotten us. With regard to Taiwan specifically, there's no sign at all that Beijing is any less intent on using force to unify Taiwan with the mainland now than it was 2 years ago. If anything, it's only gotten more capable and more belligerent. Is it your view that this administration's strategy of engagement has materially reduced the risk of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan in the next few years?

Answer. The United States is concerned by the pattern of ongoing PRC attempts to intimidate and pressure Taiwan. Beijing's actions are destabilizing, risk miscalculation, and undermine regional peace and stability. Our approach to deterrence is focused on increasing the military, political, and economic costs of precipitous action against Taiwan. Our diplomacy with the PRC clearly communicates our positions and seeks to prevent competition from veering into conflict; it does not inhibit our ability to enhance Taiwan's self-defense capabilities.

Question. Do you think any amount of engagement by this administration is likely to convince Xi Jinping to not invade Taiwan, or to delay an invasion long enough for us to get our own house in order so we can reliably deter or defeat an invasion?

Answer. An invasion is neither imminent nor inevitable. The purpose of our diplomacy with the PRC is to clearly communicate our positions and prevent competition from veering into conflict. This diplomacy does not inhibit our ability to enhance Taiwan's self-defense capabilities commensurate with the growing PRC threat, highlight Taiwan's importance to the global community, and raise international awareness of the potential consequences of the PRC's provocative behavior toward Taiwan, which is destabilizing and risks miscalculation.

Question. How do you reconcile your engagement strategy with an organization that seeks to be the "gravediggers" of capitalism by "liberating all of humanity"?

Answer. We have pursued diplomacy with the PRC with confidence, building our sources of strength at home and abroad through our allies and regional partners. It is essential that we maintain open channels of communication to prevent misperception and miscalculation. U.S. allies and partners have welcomed our Indo-Pacific Strategy and our clear-eyed approach to the PRC. Allies and partners take reassurance in our message that, while we will continue to compete with the PRC, the United States will responsibly manage competition so the relationship does not veer into conflict.

Question. How do you reconcile this engagement with the Chinese Communist Party that speaks openly about defeating the "powerful enemy adversary" on the "far seas"?

Answer. We are committed to responsibly managing the U.S.-PRC competition and ensuring it does not veer into conflict. When we speak directly to the PRC, we do so to: clearly communicate our commitment to safeguarding our national security, ensure there are no misperceptions about our commitment to our allies and partners, and deliver on key priorities for the American people, such as curbing the flow of fentanyl.

Question. After October 7, 2023, the world finally woke up to the reality that Hamas, and other radical terrorist groups operating in Gaza and Judea and Samaria, pose an existential threat to our ally, Israel. Considering the United States' historical support for Israel's right to defend itself, how does the recent decision to pause military aid to Israel during its war on Hamas and other terrorist groups align with the U.S.' longstanding policy, and what implications might this have for the U.S.' role as a mediator in future conflicts in the region?

Answer. The Administration's commitment to Israel's security is unwavering, and the President has made clear we will continue to provide the means necessary for

Israel to defend itself. To date, we have paused only one shipment of munitions to Israel consisting of 1,818 2,000 lbs. bombs. No other deliveries of weapons, munitions, equipment, or other services are paused at this time.

Question. In light of the ICC's decision to seek an unjust arrest warrant for Israeli PM Netanyahu, what specific actions does the Biden Administration intend to take in response? What is the expected timeline?

Answer. The Administration's position on this matter is well known. As we have long stated, we do not believe the ICC has jurisdiction over the situation in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. We will look for opportunities to defend U.S. and Israeli interests at the ICC and with other states. We will continue to engage with the ICC, as appropriate, on this situation and others that implicate U.S. national security interests, such as the situations in Ukraine and Darfur.

Question. Furthermore, given that neither the United States nor Israel are members of the ICC, is there concern, within the administration, that this precedent could lead to the ICC targeting U.S. leaders or personnel in the future?

Answer. As the President and I have stated, U.S. concerns about the ICC are better addressed through engagement with all stakeholders. Following such engagement, the Prosecutor announced in 2021 that he would focus the ICC's Afghanistan investigation on the Taliban and ISIS-K and "deprioritize" the aspect of the investigation that had been focused on U.S. personnel.

Question. How does the administration plan to address these concerns, and what measures are being considered to ensure the protection of U.S. allies and the interests of the United States on the international stage?

Answer. We plan to pursue multiple avenues, including coordination and constructive engagement with state parties to the Rome Statute and the ICC itself. Sanctions would undercut these efforts.

Question. This crisis has presented an insidious opportunity for our global adversaries to incite chaos and divide the American people. Many of these instigators aren't even U.S. citizens. With the Biden Administration's disastrous open border policy, it's not unreasonable to presume that many of these antagonists came here illegally. But given that many of these anti-Israel protests have taken place on college and university campuses across our Nation, we know too that many of these agitators came here by way of visas issued by the State Department. What is your plan to ensure that the visas of foreign students, faculty, and others, who are supporting Hamas' terrorist views are promptly revoked?

Answer. When the Department receives derogatory information indicating a potential ineligibility as outlined in the Immigration and Nationality Act for a visa holder, including but not limited to terrorism or criminal concerns, we take immediate action to appropriately revoke the visa. The INA does not render inadmissible individuals engaged in lawful conduct, including freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Question. What specific measures is the Department taking to better vet these prospective students to ensure they do not espouse terrorist support among our communities?

Answer. National security is the top priority of the Department of State in adjudicating visas. Officers ensure noncitizens are qualified and not subject to any visa ineligibilities under the Immigration and Nationality Act, before approving a U.S. visa. Every prospective traveler to the United States undergoes extensive security screening and all visa holders, including individuals in the United States on student visas, are continuously reviewed by law enforcement and intelligence agencies for new information that surfaces after visa issuance.

Question. A stable Latin America contributes to the prosperity of the U.S. through shared borders and economic interests, such as trade and energy supply. It also bolsters our own national security and helps mitigate issues like fentanyl deaths and out-of-control crime in our own cities. Furthermore, stability in Latin America supports our efforts to counter external geopolitical influences like China, Russia, and Iran while fostering regional cooperation on global challenges. Indeed, a stable and prosperous Latin America is vital for the U.S. as it ensures a secure and economically vibrant neighborhood that can collectively address hemispheric and global issues. What is the Department's strategy to address the multiple crises in this vital region?

Answer. We continue to work with partners to address challenges in the Western Hemisphere, including Venezuela and Haiti. We urge the Maduro regime to hold

free and fair elections and stop human rights abuses. On Haiti, we support the Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support mission to improve security and work toward a return to democracy. We press on Nicaragua to restore democracy and respect for human rights, and we also work to address cross-border drug issues with Mexico, especially on fentanyl and migration.

Question. In light of the ongoing political tensions in Venezuela, what proactive measures can be taken to address the violent suppression of opposition groups by Maduro's regime?

Answer. The United States stands with the people of Venezuela, and we remain committed to holding Maduro and his representatives accountable for their actions. We take every opportunity to highlight abuses by Maduro. We continue to assess U.S. sanctions policy toward Venezuela in accordance with U.S. interests. The Department of State maintains a reward of up to \$15 million for information leading to Maduro's arrest or conviction through the Narcotic Rewards Program. In addition, Maduro is sanctioned by the Treasury Department.

Question. Considering the possibility of electoral interference, what strategies are in place to ensure the integrity of the election process if disruptions arise from conflicts with neighboring countries, such as Guyana?

Answer. We continue to watch Guyana's Essequibo region closely. The Department fully supports Guyana's sovereignty and maintains the 1899 Arbitral Award that determined the land boundary be respected. We continue to urge Venezuela and Guyana to seek a peaceful resolution of their territorial dispute, especially through the International Court of Justice (ICJ). We will leverage diplomatic tools and strategic communication plans in place to work with the international community on a coordinated response to possible electoral interference should disruptions arise.

Question. How does the U.S. intend to address and hold accountable the Ortega-Murillo regime in Nicaragua for its reported violent repression and human rights violations?

Answer. Promoting accountability for the Ortega-Murillo regime is a Department priority in Nicaragua. The United States has imposed financial sanctions on 51 individuals and 13 entities, taken steps to impose visa restrictions on over 1,400 Nicaraguans for their role in perpetrating abuses, and added 49 Nicaraguans to the Section 353 "Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors" list. We continue to promote accountability for the regime bilaterally and multilaterally by condemning abuses and pressing for respect of human rights and democratic principles via public and private channels.

Question. Specifically, are there any measures under consideration to impede the regime's alleged exploitation of remittances, free trade agreements, and commercial air travel, which purportedly enrich the regime at the expense of the Nicaraguan people who are reliant on these economic systems during the ongoing crisis?

Answer. We continue to explore all diplomatic and economic tools to compel the regime to change course, including blocking sources of regime revenue from the U.S. financial system. The Department has taken steps to stem irregular migration and prevent the abuse of legitimate modes of travel via Managua, including through utilization of a new visa restriction policy that covers owners, executives, and senior officials of charter flight, ground, maritime transportation companies and travel agencies, and engagement with commercial airlines, as advised in a May 15 policy alert.

Question. Could you elaborate on the Department's comprehensive strategic plan for Haiti, particularly on how it intends to address the multifaceted challenges of political instability, economic development, and social welfare?

Answer. The Global Fragility Act (GFA) Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Security in Haiti comprises a 10-year plan aimed at enabling the Haitian people to create a conducive environment for lasting stability. It acknowledges that long-term stability requires improvements in security, political, economic, and social conditions for the Haitian people. The strategy adopts a sequenced approach that prioritizes establishing security as a pre-condition to longer-term efforts.

Question. In the event that the Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission is unable to mitigate the widespread gang violence and disorder, what contingency plans are in place to ensure stability and protect the interests of the Haitian people?

Answer. Our commitment to Haiti and the Caribbean is unwavering. The United States stands with its Western Hemisphere partners, CARICOM members, donor

community, and MSS mission lead nation Kenya to help Haiti return to the path of democratic and economic stability. It is our collective support to the Haitian National Police to become an established, modern, accountable, and professional law enforcement body that can uphold law and order by maintaining citizen security and ensure stability and protect the interests of the Haitian people.

Question. Considering the interim government's vulnerability, what mechanisms has the Department put in place to guarantee the transparent and accountable use of U.S. taxpayer funds, and how will these measures prevent misappropriation or inefficiency?

Answer. The United States government's internal financial, contracting, monitoring, vetting, and reporting procedures promote compliance and transparency in how it manages foreign assistance funding.

Question. Last year, you testified that a lack of U.S. production capacity is the main reason we're having trouble delivering weapons to Taiwan in a timely manner. As you put it, "[t]he long pole in the tent in providing equipment to Taiwan to defend itself is the production capacity here [in the United States]." I know the State Department and DoD are working to expand production capacity, but it's my understanding that we still face a lack of production capacity. Is that correct?

Answer. Several factors contribute to this issue, including supply chain issues, increased global demand, and manufacturing timelines that reflect the increasingly advanced nature of U.S. defense articles.

Together with DoD, we will support U.S. industry as it scales up to decrease production times to meet growing global demand among Allies and partners. We recognize it is not easy to scale up production in a competitive economic environment. We're committed to improving our systems and helping partners in and out of government do the same.

Question. Isn't it also true, though, that the United States has used Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) to send large quantities of weapons to Ukraine that Taiwan also requires for its defense, from Stingers and Javelins all the way up to HIMARS and Patriot batteries and munitions?

Answer. The United States has sent large quantities of weapons to Ukraine. While there is some needs overlap between Taiwan and Ukraine, Taiwan has the ability to procure the vast majority of its defense articles through FMS utilizing their domestic resources, while we provide for more of Ukraine's pressing defense needs through PDA.

Question. In fact, it's my understanding that the Biden Administration has deliberately chosen to prioritize Ukraine for PDA, while relying more on new production to meet Taiwan's requirements. Can you confirm that's the case?

Answer. This has been the case since Russia's 2022 invasion. Since Taiwan is able to purchase defense articles it has chosen to do so through the FMS system. We have exercised the authority provided by Congress to supplement those purchases through drawdown transfers. Ukraine, by contrast, faces immediate battlefield requirements, which we meet through PDA transfers.

Question. You testified last year that you agreed with CIA Director Burns' assessment that Xi Jinping has ordered the PLA to be ready to seize Taiwan by 2027. So, there's clearly a need to get weapons to Taiwan as quickly as possible. But you just acknowledged that we're still unable to produce weapons quickly enough to meet Taiwan's needs. So, it seems like PDA is the best—if not the only—way to get many of these weapons to Taiwan in a timely manner. With this in mind, does the administration plan to prioritize Taiwan for PDA going forward? Or do you plan to keep relying primarily on new production to meet Taiwan's requirements despite the fact, as you yourself acknowledged, that we're nowhere near being able to produce enough weapons to meet those needs?

Answer. We do not believe an invasion is imminent or inevitable. While PDA is an important tool, it is only one tool to provide for Taiwan's self-defense capabilities. While we are executing PDA for Taiwan, we are continuing to explore ways to expedite arms transfers to Taiwan using the range of authorities at our disposal.

Question. How does this administration plan to get Taiwan the weapons it needs to defend itself in time to actually deter an invasion, given competing demands elsewhere?

Answer. The Department expedites Taiwan arms sales to the greatest extent possible, consistent with this Administration's focus on urgently bolstering deterrence across the Strait. Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid, and we expect cross-

Strait differences to be resolved by peaceful means. Our support for Taiwan's self-defense capabilities is coupled with robust diplomatic and economic efforts to strengthen cross-Strait deterrence.

Question. Congress recently appropriated \$2 billion in Foreign Military Financing for the Indo-Pacific. My understanding is that this is for the region, but officials at the Department have said Taiwan would be a priority. How much of this funding will go to Taiwan? Please be specific.

Answer. Providing security assistance to Taiwan is a priority for the Department. I cannot comment on exact dollar amounts as internal deliberations are ongoing.

Question. British authorities arrested an individual who was working at the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (HKETO) in London on charges of "agreeing to undertake information gathering, surveillance and acts of deception." Britain's foreign ministry followed that up by summoning the Chinese Ambassador to answer for the espionage and cyberattacks on British soil. This follows German authorities arresting an individual who worked at the Hong Kong economic office in Berlin on charges of espionage. We also know that bounties have been issued on activists in the U.S., including a U.S. citizen, for their advocacy in the U.S. for freedom in Hong Kong. Is the State Department investigating the role of the HKETO office here in Washington, DC?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on the existence of such investigations.

Question. Have any Chinese officials working at the HKETO office in Washington been involved in acts of espionage or other activities that threaten those living in our country?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on the existence of such investigations.

Question. Have you discussed these issues with your counterparts in London and Berlin? What information have they conveyed to you?

Answer. Consistent with longstanding executive branch and Department of State policies and practices, the Department does not comment on the existence of such investigations.

Question. Should Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices Be Allowed to Operate in the U.S.?

Answer. Consistent with provisions in the Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992, the United States has permitted Hong Kong to operate three Economic and Trade Offices (HKETOs) in the United States in Washington, DC; New York; and San Francisco. We closely monitor proposals to change the legal status of HKETOs and share concerns about the deteriorating human rights and rule of law situation in Hong Kong. When considering possible changes to HKETOs' status, we would need to consider various elements of the U.S. national interest.

Question. The HKETO offices in the U.S. were established when Hong Kong had a "high degree of autonomy" from China. As you have certified in the State Department's 2024 Hong Kong Policy Act Report, "Hong Kong does not warrant treatment under U.S. law in the same manner as U.S. laws were applied to Hong Kong before July 1, 1997." There is legislation that has passed both the House and Senate Committees on Foreign Affairs that would rescind the privileges, exemptions, and immunities granted to HKETOs unless autonomy is restored to Hong Kong. Why should China, through Hong Kong, have additional diplomatic post and personnel in the U.S., especially in light of the espionage and spying charges emanating from these offices against our European allies? Is it not time for the State Department to revoke these privileges?

Answer. We are closely monitoring proposals to change the legal status of Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (HKETO) and share concerns about the deteriorating human rights and rule of law situation in Hong Kong. We have made clear to both Hong Kong and PRC authorities that attempts at transnational repression, either through HKETOs or otherwise, will not be tolerated. When considering possible changes to HKETOs' status, we would need to consider various elements of the U.S. national interest.

Question. The Chinese Communist Party orchestrated the passage of the draconian Article 23 legislation in Hong Kong that is part of, as you have said, "intensifying repression" and could be "applied outside of its borders as part of the PRC's

ongoing campaign of transnational repression.” Despite the State Department’s determination, no Hong Kong officials have been sanctioned since 2021. It should be noted that in 2020, it took the Trump Administration only 5 weeks after passage of Hong Kong’s National Security Law to issue sanctions, and Article 23 is much worse by all accounts. When can we expect any actions by the State Department in the coming weeks to respond to “intensifying repression” in Hong Kong?

Answer. We are deeply concerned that the broad and vague provisions in the Article 23 legislation will compound the damage done by the 2020 National Security Law by further curtailing the rights and freedoms promised to the people in Hong Kong. We continuously evaluate the best approach and response to the dismantling of Hong Kong’s autonomy and rule of law. We welcome consultations with you for potential actions as we consider all options to promote accountability for those involved in human rights abuses, transnational repression, and erosion of Hong Kong’s autonomy.

RESPONSES OF MR. ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Question. Since May 2022, U.S.-headquartered Vulcan Materials Company’s operations in Quintana Roo, Mexico, have been harassed and intimidated by the Mexican government, including a March 2023 military occupation of the company’s property. This is all part of a systematic effort to rob Vulcan of its legally held land and deepwater port. It has now been 17 months since Vulcan was last able to operate its business in Mexico. During that same time period, Vulcan’s property has twice been illegally occupied by Mexican military and law enforcement forces. What has the Biden Administration done to deter these types of actions?

Answer. We are following this dispute closely. We speak regularly with Mexican officials about our expectation that U.S. companies are treated fairly and in accordance with trade obligations, which provide trade and investment certainty in Mexico. In 2018, Vulcan Materials Company filed an arbitration claim, which is still pending. While the United States does not take a position on the merits of the ongoing investment dispute, we have underscored to Mexican officials that cases like these can negatively impact Mexico’s efforts to attract future investment.

Question. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has threatened to imminently expropriate Vulcan’s property by turning it into what he claims will be “an environmentally protected area” if the company does not accept his offer to purchase the property for a fraction of its fair-market value. If President López Obrador follows through on his threat to expropriate Vulcan’s assets, what will the Biden Administration’s specific response be?

Answer. We are always concerned about the fair treatment of our companies abroad, including in Mexico. In 2018, Vulcan Materials Company filed an arbitration claim, which is still pending. The Department of State does not take a position on the merits of an ongoing investment dispute.

Question. If President López Obrador follows through on his threat to expropriate Vulcan’s assets, how will this impact the Biden Administration’s review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)?

Answer. The Administration is preparing carefully for the upcoming 2026 review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. I refer you to the Office of the United States Trade Representative for more details on the 2026 United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement review.