

**NOMINATIONS OF THE 113TH  
CONGRESS—SECOND SESSION**

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**HEARINGS**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS**

**SECOND SESSION**

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JANUARY 16 THROUGH DECEMBER 2, 2014  
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## NOMINATION OF ANTONY BLINKEN

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2014

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

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Antony John Blinken, of New York, to be Deputy Secretary of State

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The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:01 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez, Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Corker, Risch, Rubio, Johnson, Flake, and McCain.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. This nomination hearing for Tony Blinken as Deputy Secretary of State will come to order. Let me welcome you back to the committee. As the former staff director of the committee for Chairman Biden at the time, you know as much about the nomination process as anyone, although perhaps you are less familiar with being on that side of the table.

Between your service here and in the White House, you also understand, I think, the challenge of managing multiple complex situations concurrently, and those experiences, I believe, will serve you well as confirmed for this position.

Your nomination as Deputy Secretary of State comes at a time when the United States is facing a range of critical challenges, from Ebola in West Africa to Russian aggression in Ukraine, to the challenge of countering ISIL in Syria and Iraq, to Iran's continued quest for a nuclear weapons program. At the same time, we are seeking to forge new global partnerships with India, in the Middle East and Asia, and looking for opportunities to expand American exports and business opportunities.

So there will be no shortage of critical issues that you will face. Each will require your full attention and the full attention of this committee, and I look forward to hearing your views on all of these issues and working closely with you on issues of mutual concern should you be confirmed.

Foremost on our national security agenda is countering the barbarity of ISIL, whose terrorist ambitions threaten our national security as well as the stability of the entire region. I would like to

hear from you today about the administration's views on a new ISIL-specific AUMF.

I was hoping that the committee would hear from security Kerry and/or security Hagel this week on the President's announced plan to work with Congress on a new AUMF, an authorization for the use of military force, but that did not happen. I continue to believe it is incumbent that Congress take the lead in authorizing the use of force, and in my view any prolonged military campaign requires a new, congressionally approved AUMF, and I believe that Congress should act and the administration should seek expeditious congressional action.

We also face a continued crisis in Ukraine, where the cease-fire is collapsing, as more Russian tanks, troops, and weapons cross the border into eastern Ukraine. In my view it is time to provide defensive lethal military assistance to Ukraine and escalate pressure on Putin. Sanctions are impacting Russia's economy, but Putin continues on a reckless path and all indicators point to an imminent offensive to carve out a land bridge to Crimea.

I believe we must be willing to raise the cost to Putin, which will only come through the provision of defensive lethal military assistance to the government in Kiev. Clearly, that is just a beginning of a long list of challenges. The diplomatic calculations are complicated, and all of these challenges will be part of your portfolio as the Deputy Secretary of State.

I know that there will be times when we will agree and times that we will disagree. But I look forward to working closely with you should you be confirmed. I think your experience to date poises you to do an excellent job in this regard. And I look forward to the answers to your questions, but unless they surprise me I look forward to supporting you.

Senator Corker.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CORKER,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

Senator CORKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing. I want to thank Mr. Blinken for his service to our country and his willingness to serve in this capacity.

This position I think, as most people know, is a very, very important position. The Deputy Secretary serves as the Secretary of State when the Secretary is out of country, and he also is the principal adviser to the Secretary. A lot of people, I think, do not understand the importance sometimes of this position, so it is very important, and it is important that he is a very candid adviser to the Secretary.

We have had the benefit of having someone who is a professional for 30 years. He has just left, and he is someone who is very independent. He shared the good, the bad, and the ugly. I know we had a very private conversation the other day. I hope you are going to be as forthcoming today as you were in our office.

But it is my strong desire that the person who fills this position is equally as independent and has the ability to share with us, because it is our liaison to be able to make the kinds of judgments we need to make here. On that note, I just have to say we have had some terse conversations in the past when I felt like, speaking

for the White House, I was being spun, I was not being talked to as a person about reality; I was being spun. We have had a conversation about that and likely will have a conversation today about that. But obviously this position is a very different position than someone spinning, if you will, for the White House and trying to paint a flowery picture about what has occurred.

So it will be your responsibility, if confirmed, to provide us the kind of information and work with us directly to help us create the best foreign policy for our Nation. It is my hope that during this hearing again you will demonstrate that independence. If you are confirmed, again I expect you to work very, very closely with us. Again I look forward to your testimony today, and again I want to thank you. I know we talked extensively about your background and your upbringing. I hope you will share some of that during your opening comments. But I do appreciate the fact that you have an extensive background and I do appreciate your commitment to serving our country in an appropriate way.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I know Senator Schumer wanted to be here to introduce you. But because of votes we decided to move up the hearing, with the agreement of the ranking member, in order to try to get the bulk of this hearing in before we have a large number of votes, votes that are going to take a fair amount of time. So I appreciate his willingness to come before the committee and recommend you to the committee and we look forward to putting his statement in the record.

Let me remind you that your full statement will be entered into the record, without objection. I would ask you to summarize in about 5 minutes or so, so we can get to the heart of questions and answers that the members are going to want to hear. I certainly invite you to introduce any family members who are here with you today, since we know that they are part of the sacrifice of serving our Nation and we thank them in advance for the support they lend you in carrying out your duties.

With that, you are welcome to proceed.

**STATEMENT OF ANTONY BLINKEN, OF NEW YORK,  
NOMINATED TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE**

Mr. BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, thank you very much. And to you members of the entire committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to become Deputy Secretary of State. I am grateful to the President for the privilege of this nomination and I am grateful to two past chairmen of this committee: to Secretary of State Kerry for his confidence in me; and to Vice President Biden for his friendship, his partnership, and his mentorship for more than a decade.

It is indeed a novel experience for me to sit on this side of the dais. For 6 years I served as staff director of this committee, in the majority, in the minority. I sat where Mr. Ryan and Mr. Munson are sitting right now, in my case behind then-Senators Biden, Helms, Lugar, Hagel, Dodd, Kerry, Obama, as well as several distinguished Senators who will be here today.

I watched them work together in the best tradition of bipartisan American foreign policy, to strengthen our diplomacy, to advance our interests and our values around the world.

During those 6 years, I developed enormous respect for the Senate as a whole and for this committee in particular, for its members, for its staff, and for its indispensable role in shaping our Nation's foreign policy. If confirmed, I will do my best to uphold the standards of professionalism that I learned here in this room, in these halls, and I pledge to work closely with all of you to try to fulfill the potential of American leadership.

There is another reason I am very attached to this committee. It confirmed my father, Donald Blinken, to be Ambassador to Hungary. It confirmed my uncle, Alan Blinken, to be Ambassador to Belgium. And just last year, it confirmed my wife, who is sitting behind me, Evan Ryan, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. So I really hope that nothing I do today gives you cause to break this fine tradition of diplomatic service in our family.

The CHAIRMAN. We hope you can do as well as she did. (Laughter.)

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me just say—and, Ranking Member Corker, we have talked about this; Chairman Menendez, we have talked about this—I recognize that, if confirmed, I will play a difficult role. Part of my current job at the White House is to explain and defend this administration's policies, including with Congress. If confirmed, my new job would bring a different responsibility—to work with this committee and the leadership of the State Department to advance our foreign policy and the national interest around the world.

I have consulted with leaders I consider friends who played similar roles in the past, including Bob Zoellick, John Negroponte, Rich Armitage, Jim Steinberg, Strobe Talbott. I have to tell you that, if confirmed, my role model would be my immediate predecessor, Bill Burns, a man who epitomizes the word "professional," who served Republican and Democratic administrations alike with integrity, with balance, and with decency.

Let me also begin by thanking the committee for its work over the last 2 years. Whether it was the Ukraine loan guarantee, PEPFAR reauthorization, embassy security, OAS reform, pushing forward State Department nominees, this committee has played an indispensable role in translating our foreign policy vision into practice, and indeed bringing the vision itself. If confirmed to my new position, I would again want to work very closely with every member.

If I am confirmed, I would also be coming full circle to where I started in government 21 years ago, in the Department of State. Virtually every day since then—during my time at State; during 13 years over two administrations at the White House on the National Security Council staff; and during my tenure with this committee—I have worked with the men and women of the State Department. I have experienced firsthand their extraordinary leadership of our foreign policy at a time of immense challenge and change. I have watched them do more than most Americans will ever know to keep us safe, to keep us secure, to keep us prosperous. I have wit-

nessed their passion, I have witnessed their energy, I have witnessed their courage. And I have seen them bring luster and strength to a word that deserves our respect: diplomacy.

Just in the past year, American diplomacy has mobilized countries around the world to confront ISIL and Ebola, to sanction Russia for its aggression in Ukraine, to revitalize NATO's commitment to the defense of its own members. That same hard-nosed diplomacy, backed by the credible threat of force, eliminated Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, achieved a first-step agreement with Iran that stopped and in some respects rolled back its nuclear program.

Secretary Kerry's personal diplomacy helped the competing Afghan political blocks achieve the first peaceful political transition in that country's history, and the Secretary has worked tirelessly to build a secure, lasting peace and the Jewish, democratic State of Israel and the Palestinians, just as we stand resolutely with Israel whenever and wherever it is under threat.

We saw American diplomacy in action this summer at the first-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders summit, building new relationships among governments, with the private sector, to unleash the next era of African growth, strengthen democratic institutions, deepen our security partnerships.

We saw it at the Inter-American Development Bank just a week ago, with Vice President Biden bringing countries together to support the leaders of Central America as they develop plans to strengthen their institutions and economies and combat the corruption, crime, and trafficking that affect us here at home.

Just this past week, we also saw it in Asia, where President Obama led our diplomacy to strengthen the core institutions in Asia, to enlist China in the effort to roll back climate change, to build greater confidence between our militaries, lower tariffs on information technology, expand visas to the benefit of our students, businesses, and the economy, to advance Burma's democratization, to bring the Trans-Pacific Partnership closer to fruition, representing 40 percent of world GDP.

You know, in a few weeks, just before Christmas, I think many of us, certainly we, will engage in what is an annual ritual, and that is to watch "It's a Wonderful Life" on television. We all know what happened to Bedford Falls when George Bailey was out of the picture, and to me, at least, it is self-evident where the world would be without American leadership in the picture on all the challenges I just mentioned.

So I would submit to you that the question before us is not whether America is leading, for I believe we are, but rather how we are leading, to what ends, to what effect? That is a proper subject for debate, discussion, and dialogue.

Mr. Chairman, I have submitted for the record some of my thoughts on the answer to this question. I would just like to leave you, if I could, with a personal note. I wanted to give you some very brief insight into what brought me to government service and what motivates me every day to carry out that service. I am very fortunate. I was born into a family that had done very well. I actually acquired four parents along the way. I am blessed with two

wonderful stepparents, as well as my parents, who have given me incredible love and support in everything that I have done.

I grew up in New York, then at an early age moved to France. In France I had the unique experience from age 9 to 18 of beginning to see the world through the eyes of others, but in particular to see my own country through the eyes of others. I found myself enlisted at a very young age in playing junior diplomat, trying to explain the United States to my fellow students. This was during the end of the Vietnam war, the cold war, Afghanistan. And I think that is what got me most motivated and interested to do this work.

But even more than that, it is the family story. I think we all come from family stories that resonate and move us in certain directions. My grandfather—my father's father—fled what is now Ukraine, fleeing a pogrom, coming to the United States like so many others, supporting his mother, his younger brother, working his way through school, sending his own sons off to Harvard, including my father, who became Ambassador to Hungary and was in Hungary and got the Hungarian Government to help bring in American troops so that they could go into Bosnia and protect its people. I am proud of my father every day for the way he has conducted his life and his service.

His wife, my stepmother, fled Communist Hungary, literally at night on a train, as a young child, spirited out of the country. Her mother, married in a sham marriage to get out of the country, she came to the United States. She was welcomed here, and she has given so much service over her life to the International Rescue Committee, to help others in need.

My own mother, who has spent her entire career bringing the greatest American artists around the world—at times when our policies are under challenge, that soft power that she has done so much to advance has done wonders for our foreign policy.

Finally, her husband, my stepfather. He was made an American by a special act of Congress. He served in the Kennedy administration. He started life in Bialystok, Poland. He is among, if not the youngest, survivor of Auschwitz, having spent 4 years in the concentration camps.

At the very end of the war, when he was being marched on a death march out of the camps—the allies were advancing from one side, the Russians from the other—he made a run for it, and he found cover despite the German fire. A day later, having taken cover, he heard a sound, a rumbling sound. It was a large tank, and as he looked out from his shelter he looked at the tank and, instead of seeing the dreaded swastika, he saw something else—a five-pointed white star.

And he ran for the tank. The hatch opened up. He got down on his knees and he spoke the only three words in English that he knew and that his mother had taught him: "God bless America." And the GI lifted him from the ground into the tank, into the United States, into freedom.

It is those experiences from my parents, their lives, their service, that have motivated me to come to this place and motivated me to want to do the job that I stand before you for consideration.

So, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, I am grateful for this opportunity. I am grateful for your consideration. I look for-

ward, if confirmed, to working with everyone on this committee, and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Blinken follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANTONY J. BLINKEN

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to become Deputy Secretary of State.

I'm grateful to President Obama for the privilege of this nomination and to two past chairmen of this committee—to Secretary of State Kerry for his confidence in me; and to Vice President Biden for his friendship, partnership and mentorship for more than a decade.

It is a novel experience for me to sit on this side of the dais. For 6 years, I served as staff director of this committee, in the majority and the minority. I sat where Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Munson sit—in my case behind then-Senators Biden, Helms, Lugar, Hagel, Dodd, Kerry, Obama, as well as several distinguished Senators here today. I watched them work together in the best tradition of bipartisan American foreign policy to strengthen American diplomacy and advance our interests and values around the world. During those 6 years, I developed enormous respect for the Senate as a whole and for this committee in particular—for its members, its staff, and its indispensable role in shaping our foreign policy.

If confirmed, I will do my best to uphold the standards of professionalism that I learned here, in this room and in these halls. And I pledge to work closely with all of you to fulfill the potential of American leadership.

There is another reason I am so attached to this committee. It confirmed my father, Donald Blinken, to be Ambassador to Hungary; my uncle, Alan Blinken, to be Ambassador to Belgium, and just last year, my wife, Evan Ryan, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. I hope that nothing I do today gives you cause to break this family tradition of diplomatic service.

I recognize that, if confirmed, I will play a different role. Part of my current job at the White House is to explain and defend this administration's policies—including with Congress. If confirmed, my new job would bring a different responsibility—to work with this committee and the leadership of the State Department to advance our foreign policy and the national interest around the world. I've consulted with leaders I consider friends who have played this role in the past—including Bob Zoellick, John Negroponte, Rich Armitage, Jim Steinberg, and Strobe Talbott. If confirmed, my role model would be my immediate predecessor, Bill Burns—a man who epitomizes the word "professional," and who served Republican and Democratic administrations alike with integrity, balance, and decency.

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If confirmed, my new position would bring me full circle to where I started in government 21 years ago: the Department of State. Virtually every day since—during my time at State; my 13 years over two administrations on the National Security Council Staff at the White House; and my tenure with this committee—I've worked with the men and women of the State Department. I've experienced firsthand their extraordinary leadership of our foreign policy at a time of immense challenge and change. I've watched them do more than most Americans will ever know to keep us safe, secure, and prosperous. I've witnessed their passion, energy, and courage. I've seen them bring luster and strength to a word that deserves our respect: diplomacy.

Just in the past year, American diplomacy has mobilized countries around the world to confront ISIL and Ebola, to sanction Russia for its aggression in Ukraine and to revitalize NATO's commitment to the defense of its members. That same hard-nosed diplomacy, backed by a credible threat of military force, eliminated Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles and achieved a first-step agreement with Iran that stopped and in some respects rolled back its nuclear program. Secretary Kerry's personal diplomacy helped competing Afghan political blocs achieve the first peaceful political transition in their country's history. And he has worked tirelessly to build a secure, lasting peace between the Jewish, democratic State of Israel and the Palestinians—just as we stand resolutely with Israel whenever and wherever it is under threat.



We saw American diplomacy in action this summer, at the first-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders summit—building new relationships among governments and the private sector to unleash the next era of African growth, to strengthen democratic institutions, and to deepen our security partnerships.

We saw it again at the Inter-American Development Bank, where Vice President Biden convened two dozen countries to build support for the efforts of Central American leaders to strengthen their institutions and economies, and combat the corruption, crime, and trafficking that affect our own security here in the United States.

And just this past week, President Obama led the administration's diplomacy in Asia to strengthen its core institutions; to enlist China in the effort to roll back climate change, build greater confidence between our militaries, lower tariffs on information technology and expand visas to the benefit of our students, businesses, and economy; to advance Burma's democratization; and to bring the Trans-Pacific Partnership closer to fruition—further liberalizing trade among economies that represent 40 percent of world GDP.

In a few weeks, just before Christmas, many of us will engage in an annual ritual: watching "It's a Wonderful Life" on television. We all know what happened to Bedford Falls when George Bailey was out of the picture. I think it is self-evident where the world would be without American leadership on all the challenges I just mentioned.

So I would submit to you that the question before us is not whether America is leading—for we are—but rather how we are leading—by what means and to what ends—now and into the future. That is the question we can—and must—answer together.

For all the progress we've made, many daunting challenges remain.

We've struck huge blows against al-Qaeda's senior leadership; now, we must defeat its progeny in the Middle East and North Africa, which threaten our interests, allies, and partners.

We liberated the people of Libya from a tyrant; now, we must work with the new government to fill a power vacuum and address that country's turmoil.

We eliminated the strategic threat posed by Syria's chemical weapons; now, we must stop a civil war that rages on, killing innocents, sending waves of refugees throughout the region and attracting violent extremists.

We've advanced nuclear security around the world, with countries taking concrete steps to secure or eliminate materials; now, we must press for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and pursue a comprehensive agreement to ensure that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

We have strengthened the security and resilience of the Internet that is so vital to our economy, safety, and health; now, we must get ahead of attacks by malicious governments, criminals, and individual actors.

We've made America the world leader in fighting pandemics and improving global health security—building on the work of the Bush administration; now our leadership is vital to checking the spread of infectious diseases, with new microbes and viruses and the potential deliberate release of pathogens all accelerated by globalization.

We've led the way in promoting more open governance, combating corruption and empowering civil society and young leaders in emerging democracies; now, we must help those making the transition from demanding rights and freedoms to building the institutions that can guarantee them.

We've emerged from the global economic crisis and revitalized our own economy as an engine for global economic growth; now, our leadership remains critical to prevent future crises that threaten global stability.

The strategic environment in which we must contend with these and other challenges is more fluid, fraught with complexity but also more full of opportunity than ever before.

Power among states is shifting, with new entrants and aspirants to the ranks of the majors.

Power is shifting below and beyond the nation-state, requiring governments to be more accountable to substate and nonstate actors—including increasingly empowered individuals.

The growing interdependence of the global economy and the rapid pace of technological change are linking people, groups, and governments in unprecedented ways—incentivizing new forms of cooperation but also creating shared vulnerabilities.

A struggle for power is underway among and within many states in the Middle East and North Africa—a combustible process of defining a new order.

The global energy market is in the midst of profound change, with developing countries now consuming more energy than developed ones and the United States,

the world's largest natural gas and oil producer, with our dependence on foreign oil at a 20-year low and declining.

To most effectively advance America's interests in such a volatile environment, we must lead with purpose—to ensure the security of our country, its citizens, our allies and our partners; to promote a strong U.S. economy; to advance our values; and to shape an international order that bolsters peace, security, and opportunity.

We must lead from a position of strength—with unrivaled military might, a dynamic economy and the unmatched strength of our human resources.

We must lead by example—lifting our citizens, growing our economy, and living our values here at home, all of which strengthen our leadership abroad.

We must lead with capable partners—because we can best advance our interests in an interconnected world when others are working with us, while recognizing that American leadership is necessary to mobilize collective action.

We must lead with all of the instruments of American power—with an ever-ready military and our economic might that can empower diplomacy and development.

And we must lead with perspective. For all our unique power, there are historic transitions underway in the world that are not about us and cannot be fully controlled by us. But American leadership, more than that of any other nation, can shape this change, mitigate its risks, and seize its opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, members of the committee—we all share a stake in, and a commitment to, the continued renewal of American leadership in the world. Congress plays a vital role in this. Our foreign policy is more effective and sustainable when it benefits from strong congressional engagement and oversight. Even when there are disagreements, I know firsthand and from both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue the imperative of open dialogue and working together. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance American leadership and diplomacy, to deliver results for the American people and to make our country—and the world—more peaceful and prosperous.

Thank you for your consideration.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you. That is a very riveting personal history. That is very insightful.

Let me ask you a couple questions. As you know, the President has stated that he is interested in engaging Congress on a new AUMF. As you also may know, I am personally uncomfortable—and I understand all the claims of both constitutional and other authorities under existing AUMF's, but I am personally uncomfortable on relying on either the 2001 September 11 AUMF and certainly the 2002 Iraq AUMF to prosecute action against ISIL. I think if you are going to have, as the President has clearly stated, a new prolonged military campaign, that that needs a congressionally approved AUMF.

First of all, do you agree that we should be pursuing a new ISIL-specific AUMF?

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. The President has said that the administration would be presenting what he thinks needs to be the set of authorities in that AUMF. In my own view, such an authorization for the use of military force should be specific to ISIL and should not—and should include authority, I should say, to go after individuals and organizations fighting for or on behalf of ISIL, should be limited to 3 years or some other reasonable timeframe, should foreclose the possibility of a large-scale, enduring ground combat mission that we saw in Iraq from 2003 to 2011 as some of the elements of it.

Do you agree that those are appropriate elements of an AUMF to address the ISIL-specific threat?

Mr. BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, without negotiating the specifics today, I think the elements you have laid out as a general matter would be appropriate. I know we have had some opportunity to dis-

cuss them and those would seem to me to form a good basis for a conversation on developing a new AUMF.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask you on Ukraine. This committee has taken a forward-leaning view on a bipartisan basis about helping the Ukrainians not only financially, but also in defensive weapons. I know there has been a reticence by the administration to do that because we are going to, quote unquote, "provoke the Russians." Well, I do not think the Russians need much provoking because they seem to be acting without provocation.

They did it in the first instance when they invaded and ultimately annexed Crimea through irregular forces. Now, for the second time, with much less camouflage, they are engaged in having Russian troops, tanks, armored vehicles, surface-to-surface missiles—some of which I witnessed when I was in Ukraine—taking place in the original time, and now we see even after the cease-fire it happening again.

While I applaud the sanctions that the administration has pursued and this committee has supported, the reality is that unless there is a change in Putin's calculus which includes the cost of what he is pursuing in eastern Ukraine and from every information that we have seeking for that bridge to the sea there, that unless we change that calculus we are just going to see a continuous action moving forward.

So can you give me your insights—I am not talking about the administration, National Security Council. I am talking about what your insights are if you were to be confirmed in this position, as to what you would say about those views?

Mr. BLINKEN. Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A few things. Since the beginning of this crisis, we have sought to do three things. We have sought to support Ukraine, and I will come back to that. We have sought to impose costs on Russia for its actions in Ukraine. And we have sought to reassure our partners, particularly in NATO. And we have been moving aggressively, at least in my judgment, on all three of those lines of effort.

With regard to Ukraine, as you know, we have provided to date a significant amount of assistance, including about \$100 million worth of security assistance, and this includes everything from the infamous MREs and blankets, but also, as you know, things like night vision goggles, protective vests, countermortar radar—which is in fact just being delivered—communications gear, transportation gear, et cetera.

We have not, you are right, provided lethal defensive assistance. Part of the reason has been that in our judgment, as much as we are able to throw at the Ukrainians, anyone can give them in terms of lethal support, unfortunately, if the Russians choose to, they will outmatch that easily.

That said, what we have seen in recent days and in recent weeks, including the blatant violation by Russia of the very agreements it signed, the Minsk Accords, which among other things require it to help reestablish the international border, to make sure that Ukraine has sovereignty over its own border, to make sure that that border is monitored and that there is a buffer zone—instead of doing that, it has gone in exactly the opposite direction. It has deployed more forces to the border. We have compelling in-

formation that those forces have been sent into Ukraine and sent to the separatists.

So the question of defensive lethal assistance has never been off the table. It remains on the table. It is something that we are looking at, and indeed the Vice President will be in Ukraine in the next few days and I am sure that will be a topic of discussion.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we have worked very hard to impose significant costs on Russia for its actions there. I believe we have. The challenge is that many of those costs will play out over time. But I think some of them are already visible and they are getting more and more visible.

As a result of bringing the Europeans together on sanctions repeatedly, we have seen already a significant impact on the Russian economy. We have seen capital flight that is of great magnitude. We have seen foreign direct investment drying up. We have seen the ruble hit an all-time low. We have seen Russia having to dip into foreign reserves, \$70, \$80 billion.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me interrupt you—but we have seen that, too, and we have also seen Putin continue to invade Ukraine. So while I appreciate that it is not off the table, if we do not exercise the—from my perspective, if we do not exercise the ability to give Ukraine defensive weapons, maybe Russia can overpower it if it chooses to do so—I will not dispute that—but by the same token, the consequences of how many Russian sons will be sent back to Russia as a result of that has to affect Putin's calculation.

The problem is that as time progresses that becomes an increasingly less likely proposition and less effective. So I hope that you are going to calculate that in a much more significant way, because, yes, the sanctions are biting, yes, there are consequences, and also yes, they have not deterred Putin from acting.

Let me ask you one other question. There is a whole universe of the world to engage in here, so it is difficult. Let me ask you one other question. I specifically—working with Senator Rubio—looked at what was happening in Venezuela and said to ourselves: This is amazing; here in the Western Hemisphere you have a country that is violating its citizens' human rights simply protesting against its government, repressed by military force, and a country that, even though it has one of the largest oil reserves in the world, cannot put basic commodities on the shelves for its people. So people protest peacefully to try to make a point to their government.

We were rebuffed by the administration in pursuing sanctions against the Maduro regime. We gave time for everybody who had some expectation of negotiations, and they were going to get there and bring Maduro to a different place. And guess what, we are in the same circumstances. We have the leader of the opposition in a sham trial where he cannot even present defenses, which tells you everything about the legal system in Venezuela. And if I go visit Venezuela, the screening process I have to go through is with Cuban security agents who run Venezuela's security.

Can you really tell me that our policy there is a success or have we recalibrated and decided that at this point sanctions is an appropriate way to proceed?

Mr. BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, we share your views of the Maduro government and his leadership. We are working with partners in

Latin America to see if they could, with us and others, get some of the opposition leaders out of jail, move forward on electoral reform. In doing that, they told us that sanctions at that point might be counterproductive, and we thought it was worth letting them try, with our support, to move forward.

As we sit here today, that has not succeeded. They have tried. It has not produced results. So, given that, we would not oppose moving forward with additional sanctions. As you know, the administration took steps of its own this summer, in consultation with Congress, including visa restrictions on violators of human rights. But we would look forward to working with you to go further.

I think there is still an opportunity to try to get a reformed electoral commission that brings the opposition onto the commission, that has Congress do that before it gets pushed to the Supreme Court, where of course nothing will happen. I think that is worth a shot and I would like to be able to work, if confirmed, with you on that.

I would also say that you are exactly right, Maduro is going to have increasingly difficult problems delivering for his people. He needs oil to be at about \$85 a barrel—and it is, of course, lower than that—in order for him to make good on his social contract. That is not happening. So I think the squeeze is getting tougher and tougher.

The last thing I will say on this: My cousin went to school with Leopoldo Lopez, so, believe me, I hear from her regularly about his status and what we are doing to help him.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I, too, want to thank you for sharing the compelling stories of your family and again for your desire to serve in this way.

I think you know this because we have had this conversation, and I am sure you have read this, but there has been some concern about the President's desire, it seems, to have people that are very close to him in various positions and to be very insular. While your role in your current job is one to champion the administration's policies, as you mentioned in your opening statement, this one is very different. One of the criticisms of the administration, I think, it would be hard to debate, although I am sure it would be debated, has been that he has been a day late and a dollar short on so many things, has been cautious, has had internal debates that protract. Things fester, things get worse, it is very difficult to overcome, as your conversation with Chairman Menendez about Ukraine.

Do you believe you have the abilities in this other position to be a bulwark against this cautious navel-gazing and to bring clarity to foreign policy in a way that would allow our Nation to move ahead and show the leadership that you talked about in your opening comments?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator. In my current job, my role has been to try to bring what we call the interagency together, so that every voice is heard as we deliberate policy, we bring all of these judgments to bear, and then we try and lift up a recommendation to the Cabinet, to the President. Part of that is a deliberative process to make sure that everyone is heard and we factor everything in.

If I move over to the State Department, if confirmed, my job, among other things, will be to advocate strongly for the position of the State Department in those interagency deliberations, to do that and to try and move the process forward and to get decisions made.

Secretary Kerry is someone who is, as you know, a very passionate and energetic participant in that process. We worked very hard to deal with what is an extraordinary number of challenges that are all coming, so it seems, at the same time. But I pledge to you that, if confirmed, that is exactly what I will try to do. I have to say, I have tried to do that in my current job. I recognize the frustrations that emerge and it is something that I will continue to try to do if confirmed.

Senator CORKER. Thank you for that. I know that is the same answer you gave in the office and I appreciate that.

On Ukraine, to get specific, will you be urging, if confirmed, the Secretary of State to give lethal assistance to Ukraine now?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I believe that that is something that we must look at and look at—

Senator CORKER. I know looking at it is one thing. We have been looking at it now for a long time. The question is, yes or no: In this new position, as you leave the White House, where you have to be a part of whatever is decided there, will you—again, just to raise the cost; we understand that Russia is always going to be able to overwhelm a country like Ukraine. But will you, yes or no, urge the Secretary of State to pursue a policy of arming with lethal support—appropriate lethal support that they are ready for, Ukraine?

Mr. BLINKEN. I know this may not be a satisfactory answer. Here is what I can say. I have to keep what counsel I would give—what counsel I give now to the President, what counsel I would give to the Secretary of State if confirmed, private. That would be part of the job.

But let me say this—

Senator CORKER. What is your own view?

Mr. BLINKEN. I believe that, given the serious Russian violations of the agreement that they signed, the Minsk Accord, that one element that could hopefully get them to think twice and deter them from further action is strengthening the capacity of the Ukrainian forces, including with defensive lethal equipment. So that is why I think it is something that we should be looking at.

Senator CORKER. That is not as satisfactory as our conversation the other day, but I understand we are in a public setting.

The AUMF that the chairman discussed. It has been the tradition, it is the standard, that when an AUMF is sought, as you mentioned is semi-being sought, although being sought in a very tricky way, that the administration seeks explicitly an AUMF and actually sends a draft up of what they would like for it to be, and then we begin the negotiations. do you believe that it is appropriate that if an AUMF is going to be written that the administration explicitly seek that and that you and your office are up here with a draft in direct negotiations in seeking that, yes or no?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, first can I just thank you, the committee, you personally, the chairman, for the work that you have done in the past on the Syria AUMF a year ago, on the AUMF most recently.

As you know, we have said that we would welcome an AUMF. I can tell you, not only would we welcome it, we would like it, and we would like to have a targeted, focused AUMF that deals with the challenge before us, which is defeating ISIL. The question is what is the best way to get something that gets bipartisan support, because we are much stronger if the executive branch and the legislative branch are working together and acting together, especially on issues of war and peace. And if we can get an AUMF that gets broad support, there is no question we will be better off.

We have engaged, as you know, with you, with other Members of Congress, in recent weeks on an AUMF.

Senator CORKER. You have not engaged with me. That is totally untrue.

Mr. BLINKEN. All right. Well, I know we have engaged with certain members. Let me tell you that, going forward from today, we will absolutely actively engage with you, with other interested members, on trying to come up with an AUMF that answers what is needed, which is something that is focused on ISIL, that preserves the authorities the President needs to take action in the national interest, and I hope has everyone coming together so that we can demonstrate that we are united.

So the short answer is we want to work with you on that, we want to work with you on that in the days and weeks ahead.

Senator CORKER. A very important component of seeking an AUMF explicitly is laying out what it is the administration hopes to achieve. It is a very important element. And I know that when this was all announced this fall this was a half-baked deal. I actually believe that General Allen and others are putting some elements together that are beginning to make some sense. But I think it is very important—beginning to make some sense, I might add. I think it is very important for you to explicitly ask for it and to come up here and explain fully, both in classified settings and in public settings, what the Nation can expect as an outcome if, in fact, this is authorized.

On Iran, do you believe that Congress, who put the sanctions in place, working with the administration no doubt, do you think that Congress should have the right to vote on a deal that is maybe the biggest, one of the biggest, geopolitical decisions that is going to be made by this Nation, in the event an agreement is reached with Iran?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, Congress will vote on any deal. It will have to vote on any deal, because any deal at the end of the day would include at some point the lifting of sanctions.

Senator CORKER. But if you suspend sanctions, which you can do, certainly the permanent lifting we have to vote on. The moment you suspend sanctions, you break apart the international coalition. And you know that, and Iran knows that, and that is why they have been urging you to suspend. We know that, because they know that the moment you do that and you actually begin the actual lifting under that expansion you have broken apart the entire coalition that has put these sanctions in place.

So do you not think on the front end that Congress should play a role? I am not talking about on the permanent lifting, that could

be, by the way, years down the road. I am talking about on the front end.

Mr. BLINKEN. Our view would be that we would not even suspend sanctions until Iran has taken significant steps to comply with any agreement that is reached. We have to see that first before suspension.

Senator CORKER. I understand that.

Mr. BLINKEN. And then, precisely because the hammer that Congress has wielded and has held over the heads of the Iranians has been so effective, we want to keep that in place as long as possible. We also want to make sure that there is a snapback provision so that if any sanctions are suspended, not lifted, if Iran violates the agreement or cheats in any way, the sanctions can be snapped back with some automaticity to avoid exactly the problem that you rightfully raise.

Senator CORKER. And that addresses them violating the agreement.

Mr. BLINKEN. Absolutely.

Senator CORKER. What it does not address is on the front end, if Congress believes the arrangement you have reached, even if they honor it, is unacceptable. So again I would just ask, having come from this committee, stepping into now an independent position if confirmed, do you believe that we should have the opportunity to give an approval of an agreement that has so much to do with the future of that region and the world?

Mr. BLINKEN. I think if we get to an agreement and are able to reach one, one of the things that we need to talk about and work together on is how we can most effectively work together to make sure that it is implemented and the Iranians make good on their commitments. So there may be schemes under which Congress, acting at certain times in certain ways, will make that more effective. We should talk about that. Not knowing right now what any deal is going to actually look like, what the terms will be, what the commitments will be, what the timelines will be, I think it is something we should come back and talk about and figure out how we can most effectively continue to work together to make sure any deal is implemented.

Senator CORKER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. First, Mr. Blinken, thank you very much for your public service and thank you for sharing your family's story. It is inspirational.

I just want to underscore the point that Senator Corker just made, because I think there is bipartisan support for the comments that we must be together. I think there is concern. First, I want to compliment the administration for keeping the coalition together and keeping the sanctions in the position where it has kept Iran at the negotiating table. You have been effective in doing that.

There is concern that there will be some agreements reached in the very near future, by the 24th, that may jeopardize the unity of the sanctions moving forward. I would just urge you in the strongest possible terms to work with Congress so that we are together on the strategy moving forward with Iran.



Our greatest hope is that you reach a comprehensive agreement that prevents Iran from having a breakout capacity for a nuclear weapon, with inspections, et cetera. We look forward to that. If that is not the case, then I think it is critically important that we understand and are together on the strategy moving forward and that we are together in our resolve that Iran will not become a nuclear weapons state. I would just urge you to listen to what Senator Corker has said, because I think there is strong support in Congress for the statements that he made.

I want to underscore a point that Chairman Menendez said. We were talking about the sanctions in our hemisphere that you have imposed on visas. I also applaud the administration for imposing visa restrictions on Hungary in regards to six individuals who were implicated for corruption. Senator McCain and I have authored legislation that would make the Magnitsky sanctions global, which are basically visa bans, but add the ingredient that Congress can initiate a required review by the State Department on matters that we believe should be subject to consideration of visa restrictions.

You and I had a chance to talk and I very much appreciate your commitment to basic human rights and your understanding that the U.S. national security very much depends upon stable regimes respecting human rights, and that we need to be more open about that and making that more of a priority.

My point for raising that is that I will be looking for your leadership as to how we can move forward while making it clear that this country stands strongly in support of human rights, and that we will look at ways that countries are fighting corruption. Ukraine is a good example. We are all outraged by what Russia has done. We have provided a great deal of support. We are working with their economy. But they need to deal with their problems of corruption. We just had a hearing of the Helsinki Commission today and that was the centerpiece.

I want to ask you a question following up on the point that I raised in regards to a provision dealing with the mineral rights of countries and the provision that was included in the Dodd-Frank law, known as the Cardin-Lugar provisions, that the SEC is still struggling with. It requires transparency from the extractive industries.

The court sent back their first rulings because of First Amendment concerns and the SEC it is now prepared to issue its new regulations. The reason I bring it up is that the SEC is required to consider First Amendment issues, which they should, and one of the major concerns that was expressed by the administration when Dodd-Frank was moving forward was our need for stable energy supplies and the importance for transparency and the importance of investors knowing what countries are doing and where the funds are going.

It is my understanding that the communication from the State Department and the administration could be critically important to the SEC in underscoring the importance to our country of stable energy supplies. I would just urge you to please follow up on that, because time is running out on this issue.

If you want to respond, that is fine.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Senator. Let me just say very quickly, if confirmed I welcome following up. Even if not confirmed, if there is anything I can do to be helpful—

Senator CARDIN. You still have a day job.

Mr. BLINKEN. For the time being, thank you.

I just wanted to underscore one thing you said because I think it is so important: corruption and the work that you have been doing and the other members of this committee have been doing to combat corruption. One of the things I think that is a common denominator around the world of virtually every popular movement we have seen, whether it is in Ukraine or whether it is the Arab Spring, has been people rising up in disgust at corruption. It is one of the most powerful instigators of change.

We have been working in a very deliberate way over the last 6 years to focus on this issue. I think there is more that we can do and particularly more that we can do working with Congress. One of the issues I would welcome working on, if confirmed, with you and other members of the committee, are the efforts the United States is making to combat corruption, because we see it everywhere as an instigator of change and there are ways that we can use it effectively to help advance the kind of change that we would like to see.

Senator CARDIN. I thank you for that, and I agree with you completely. In Tunisia, the Ukraine, it was about corruption; it was not about who was President or who the government was.

We just saw the recent tragedy in Israel at the synagogue, a barbaric act. Three Americans were killed. One was a relative of a constituent of mine, Judge Karen Friedman. So this hits us. It is against our own country in a way. If this happened in America there would be justified outrage and demand that our country take steps to protect the security of our country.

Israel always seems to be placed on the defensive when it come to defending its own people. Its only strong ally is the United States.

Will you continue to speak up for Israel's obligations to defend its citizens against these types of barbaric actions and preparing itself to defend the security of its own country?

Mr. BLINKEN. Absolutely. Senator, the United States has, is, and will continue to stand sentry, even if it is alone, against threats to Israel and against any attempt to undermine Israel's legitimacy. We do it day in and day out around the world in international organizations. Secretary Kerry is often at that post, again alone sometimes. We will do it as long and as hard as it takes. We will always be there.

What we saw this week was especially barbaric. Any terrorist attack is horrific. To do something in a place of worship is even beyond the pale of what we have seen before. You heard the President condemn it. Immediately the Secretary of State was on the phone with Prime Minister Netanyahu. President Abbas condemned it. Unfortunately, we saw Hamas' true colors come out in a statement glorifying it.

These murderers represent the extremism that threatens to bring the region into a bloodbath. So I think the first job—and it is incredibly difficult, especially when passions are high—is for

leaders to work to lower tensions, to reject violence, because majorities want peace. They want to work toward that. And we will work with anyone who wants that. We will work to isolate anyone who does not.

I have to tell you as well, these kinds of attacks are personal to me. I have a cousin who lives in Tel Aviv with her husband, her daughter, two sons. The daughter recently completed her military service. During Gaza this summer, her eldest son was in military training, and indeed he was training for the engineering unit that was the one that was going in to deal with the tunnels and the bombs. He was not deployed during Gaza, but he is now deployed. And another son is coming of military age.

We were getting emails from her throughout the summer about what it was like to live under the threat of these rockets and terrorists tunneling underground to try and kill or capture civilians. She talked about how the bomb shelter that they had at home, that is usually a storage room, now a bomb shelter. She talked about how, riding to work on her bike, she would ride with one earpiece out so that she could hear an air raid siren. She talked about living on a 90-second timer because that is how much time you have to get to a bomb shelter if the siren goes off. This is something that I feel is real, it is visceral.

We also saw the terrible tragedy of civilians and children being killed in Gaza. And I thought to myself as well, getting these emails from my cousin, what are Palestinian American mothers and fathers writing home to their families here about what they have experienced? We have to somehow remember the humanity that lies at the heart of all these situations. This is at the end of the day about men and women, mothers and fathers, daughters and sons. If we lose sight of that, we really lose.

But one thing is for sure and it is unshakeable. We have a fundamental commitment to Israel's security and to stand with Israel whenever and wherever it is under threat. I am very proud of the record of this administration in doing just that and it is something that will continue as long as we are acting.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Now, let me, for the edification of the members, advise you of what my intention is. My intention, since there are votes at 3 o'clock, is to ask Senator Kaine to take the chair shortly before. I am going to go vote and come back, try to keep this going as long as we can so that members can get their questions in. So if you are a little further down the rung before asking your question, you might want to go vote so you can come back and ask your question.

Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Blinken, Monday is the 24th of November. What can we expect on Monday?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, as you know, the negotiating teams are engaged at this very moment—

Senator RISCH. Understand.

Mr. BLINKEN [continuing]. On working toward an agreement. So I do not want to prejudge what may happen or may not happen. Right now, I think it is going to be difficult to get to where we

want to go. It is not impossible. It depends entirely on whether Iran is willing to take the steps it must take to convince us, to convince our partners, that its planning would be for entirely peaceful purposes. As we speak, we are not there. The Secretary of State is prepared to engage directly and personally if we have enough to go on to move this over the goal line. But it is literally a minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour thing. I was getting emails before coming here.

As we speak, I can not tell you what to expect. I can tell you that in the days ahead as we move toward the 24th we will continue to be in very close consultation with you, with the Members of the Senate, with the Members of the Congress, on where we are, where this is going, and then, depending on where this goes, to work with you to figure out what the most effective next steps would be.

I wish I could tell you today, are we going to get a deal, are we not going to get a deal. I just can not.

Let me add one thing, though. We have been very clear that we will not take a bad deal, period. Any deal that we achieve has to effectively cut off Iran's pathways to a bomb. It has to deal with the Arak facility and its ability to develop a weapon through a plutonium path. It has to deal with Fordow, the buried facility, where it was before the interim agreement producing 20 percent. It has to deal with Natanz and an effort to accumulate a large number of centrifuges and a large stockpile and be able to produce material for a bomb very quickly. And it has to deal as effectively as possible with the potential for a covert program by having an unprecedented inspection and access regime. Then we will also have to deal with the possible military dimensions of the program, with missiles, and with the sanctions piece that we talked about earlier.

So as you evaluate anything that we are able to produce, you will rightly and appropriately evaluate it against all of those lines. That is what we need to be talking about as this moves forward, and I pledge to you that in the days ahead and the weeks we will be in very close contact as we see if we can get there.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that. The operative words here are good deal versus bad deal. I have heard people from the State Department sit in the exact same chair you are sitting in and describe the last couple of deals as good deals. I have to tell you that I speak for myself, but I think probably for some other members of this committee, and that is our understanding of what a good deal is differed greatly from what the State Department's version of what a good deal was.

As you know, I was very critical of it. Other members of this committee were very critical of it. I certainly hope I do not have to be put in that position again.

I could not agree with you more. In fact, we told the Secretary of State just what the administration has been saying, and that is no deal is substantially better than a bad deal. Once that bad deal happens, you will never get that genie back in the bottle again and we are going to wind up having to live with what could be a very, very difficult situation.

So I caution you in that regard. I hope our definition and the State Department's definition of what is a good deal is substantially closer to the same point than it has been in the past.

Let me make a parochial pitch here that I have over and over and over again, and particularly to Wendy Sherman, who sat in that chair. I have a constituent that is being held there, Pastor Abedini. There is absolutely no reason he should be in prison in Iran. In addition to that, there are two other Americans that are there that are under the same circumstances, that should not be there.

It absolutely escaped logic to me why we released the billions of dollars that we did without demanding that those three be released before a penny changed hands. I just do not get it. Knowing how badly those people wanted the money, I just cannot understand why that was not the last consideration, the last requirement that was put on the table before the money changed hands.

I heard Wendy Sherman talk about it. There was a lot of talk. I still do not understand it. I would one more time say that if you do get close to that, that ought to be paragraph number 236 or whatever the last paragraph is, that this thing does not become operative until those three people walk free.

Again, just listening to you, I do not sense a lot of optimism that we are going to get to that point. But should we get to that point, I want to urge you in the strongest terms to see that those three people are turned loose and we can welcome them back here to America and my constituent back to Idaho.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, could I just say, first of all, thank you. I want you to know that every single day we are working for the release of Mr. Abedini, but also any other unjustly imprisoned American around the world. This is something that we are not only focused on, we are fixated on.

The only thing that we talk to the Iranians about other than the nuclear agreement on the margins of these conversations are the American prisoners who are there. This is something that we are determined to resolve. We are determined to bring our people home. You have my assurance that, if I am confirmed for this job, that will be at the very top of my agenda.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you very much. If I can put a little more strength into that, you know, there is a human side to this that never gets talked about. Mrs. Abedini lives in Boise, ID. She has children. The children have not seen their father for some time. They have family there. They have a close circle of friends there. This has a human component that does not get talked about. These people want their father, their husband, home very badly. I am glad to hear what you are saying, but I will be much happier when actual action takes place.

Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen, and I will ask Senator Kaine to preside.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Blinken, for both being here today and for your willingness to continue to serve the country. I want to follow up on Senator Risch's questions about the Iranian negotiations, because reports about those negotiations have suggested that, as you just did, that we are not close to reaching an agreement and that another extension might be something that people could agree on.

What positive signs or movement do we need to see in order to agree to another extension? Because I assume we would all argue that unless we think there is some reason to continue these negotiations we should not do that if they are not going anywhere.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, thank you. Here is the challenge. We are driving to the 24th. We want to see if we can get an agreement that answers our requirements, the requirements of the international community, and that is what we are focused on. As I said a moment ago, right now, if I am judging where we are, I think it will be difficult to get there, but not impossible, and it really depends on whether Iran can get to "Yes." The short answer is we do not know.

I do not want right now, at this delicate moment in the negotiations, in a public setting to get into the details, because we really have to leave that, and you will understand why, with the negotiators. However, I know that some of my colleagues were up on the Hill yesterday in a closed session going through in much more detail some of the elements of what we are looking for. I know that in the days ahead we will be doing more of that. I would welcome any opportunity certainly to talk individually or collectively, in the right setting, on those issues.

But at least as a public matter, I have to leave it to the negotiators to try to have the flexibility to do the job and get the job done.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you. Again to follow up on Senator Risch, I do hope that, in looking at an extension of negotiations, that we have some clear signs there is potential for movement if we are going to extend on our end.

To follow up on what is happening with ISIS, can you talk a little bit about the new administration in Iraq and whether they are making sufficient progress on engaging with the Sunni population so that we are seeing any real change there?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, you have raised a critical question and it goes to the heart of what we are trying to achieve and indeed what is necessary to achieve if there is going to be success against ISIL. One of the many failures of the previous Iraqi administration is that it failed to not only engage, but address, the legitimate grievances of the Sunni community. That created an environment in which large parts of that community either acquiesced to ISIL when it rose up or indeed even went into league with it because it saw it as the only way to advance its interests.

When Prime Minister Maliki, the former Prime Minister, was here in November 2013, I think before ISIL was on the map for most people, the President said to him in their meeting: The number one challenge you have is Al Qaeda in Iraq/ISIL—it was becoming ISIL—and we want to give you, and we are working to give you, the equipment and assistance you need to deal with it as a counterterrorism and military matter, but that is not enough. You have to deal with this problem comprehensively, you have to engage the Sunnis, you have to address their legitimate grievances. Otherwise we will not succeed. And, as we know, he did not.

The new government was one of the conditions that the President set before launching the comprehensive effort that we are making to counter ISIL and ultimately defeat it, precisely because

absent a government that was willing to engage the entirety of Iraq, to work with the Sunnis, to work with the Kurds, that strategy could not effectively succeed.

What we have seen, I think, is significant progress. I was in Iraq about 4 weeks ago for a week. I spent a lot of time with virtually all of the leadership in Baghdad on all sides: military leaders, economic leaders, all of the government leaders, the President, the Prime Minister, the head of the Council of Representatives, political party leaders. What I found was that virtually everyone was giving the benefit of the doubt to the Prime Minister and the new leadership to try to move the country forward.

He has taken a number of very significant steps already. First, the former Prime Minister, Maliki, had established something called the Office for the Commander in Chief to basically short-circuit the military and have it report directly to the Prime Minister's office and make it his personal service, which was a disaster. Prime Minister Abadi eliminated that office and fired the people in charge.

Last week he fired 36 generals, many of whom were beholden to the previous government, had a sectarian agenda, or were incompetent. That was significant.

Maybe most significant of all, there is a national program that they need to move forward on to address legitimate grievances of the Sunnis, but also they are seized with an idea that we have been working with them on and that is to form a national guard. What that would do would be to enlist from local communities and provinces people to protect those communities and provinces. So in the Sunni areas you would be enlisting Sunnis to protect their own. But they would be tethered to the state because it would pay their salaries and provide them with equipment.

This would build on and in a sense institutionalize something that was so successful in the 2006–2007 period and that was the Sons of Iraq during the surge. There is tremendous promise there.

It is going to take a little while to get that stood up. So meanwhile we have been working with the Iraqis—and the government is really pushing this—on a bridging mechanism to get there. That is, how can we now deal with the fact that many of these tribes want to work with the government, they see their future is better with Iraq than it is with ISIL, but they need support, they need equipment, they need money? So the government is working on a program, with our support, to bring in about 5,000 tribesmen, to pay them, to equip them, to get them working with Iraqi Security Forces right now to deal with ISIL.

So I came away from my most recent trip and from virtually daily engagement believing that the Prime Minister is moving things in the right direction, he is reaching out, he is engaging, and if that succeeds that offers real promise to our overall efforts.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I am almost out of time, but when we spoke on the phone we talked about the special immigrant visa program and the need to make sure that that moves forward. I wonder if you can tell me what we are hearing from Afghanistan now as we are looking at the drawdown of our troops and the importance of that program and whether we are going to be able to

provide the visas that are required for the people who are being threatened?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, first I want to commend your leadership on this issue. It has been absolutely instrumental in answering an obligation that I believe we have, and that is this program, addressed specifically to people in Iraq and in Afghanistan who have gone to work with us, who put their lives on the line for us, who put their families on the line by their association with us, deserve our every effort, if they qualify, to bring them to the United States and out of harm's way.

This is something that I have been focused on in my current capacity. It is something I believe in deeply. In Afghanistan, in a sense because of the success that we have had, we are running up against the limit and we need to be able to do more. We want to work with you very actively and aggressively to be able to do that, because we cannot abandon these people who put themselves on the line for the United States.

So I look forward, if confirmed, to working with you on those issues, and I really thank you for everything that you have done to date.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Kaine [presiding]. Senator Johnson.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Blinken, again thank you for your service and your willingness to serve. I want to first acknowledge the fact that these issues you are dealing with, these problems, are enormously challenging. There is nothing easy about them whatsoever. What I want to try and find out during my questioning is, Have you, has this administration, learned from the misjudgments, past mistakes? Are we willing to recognize reality?

We talked a little bit earlier about Ukraine. I have heard members of the administration repeatedly talk about how Vladimir Putin is looking for off-ramps. I believe Vladimir Putin is looking for nothing but on-ramps. Can you just give me your evaluation of that? Do you really think that he is looking for a way out of this, a way out of this situation, or is he really looking to continue to be aggressive?

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Senator. In my judgment, President Putin has managed to precipitate virtually everything he sought to prevent through this crisis and through the aggressive actions he has taken in Ukraine. Ukraine is now more Western-oriented than it has ever been and indeed it has more of a national identity than it has had, and in effect, even with the terrible aggression in eastern Ukraine and Crimea, he has lost the bulk of the country.

He has precipitated as well NATO being more energized than it has been, Europe more focused on energy security. We talked a little earlier about the economic—

Senator JOHNSON. I really want my question answered. Is Vladimir Putin looking for off-ramps?

Mr. BLINKEN. To get to your question, because it is a very important one, I agree, Senator, here is the challenge. This is at least in my judgment. What has happened is this. President Putin has



probably lost his ability, as a result of their own mismanagement of the economy and in my judgment as a result of the pressure exerted, to deliver effectively for his people economically. Of course, oil prices have played a big part in that. That leaves him with one card and that is the nationalist card. When you play that card, I think in the short term it can be beneficial. You rally people around the flag, your numbers go up, and we have seen that.

Here is the problem. If you stop playing the card, people then start to focus on the fact that actually things are not going so well and you have led them down the wrong path. So that is why this is the challenge. He does need an off-ramp. Otherwise he will keep playing the card, he will keep taking steps that are dangerous and destabilizing and that are going to create even greater conflict.

So we thought, and we continue to believe, that the Minsk agreement that Russia signed was an appropriate off-ramp, if that is what you like to call it, for Russia and a way of moving forward to help Ukraine regain its sovereignty. Unfortunately, to date—

Senator JOHNSON. He is not taking it.

Mr. BLINKEN [continuing]. He has not taken it.

Senator JOHNSON. I thought President Poroshenko gave an extraordinary speech before a joint session of Congress. What was your reaction, what was the White House's reaction, to President Poroshenko reminding all of us that you cannot defeat Soviet aggression with blankets?

Mr. BLINKEN. We saw the President shortly after his speech to Congress and the President met with him, the Vice President, and others. And we have talked about this a little earlier in this, in today's session. We have worked very hard to support Ukraine across the board. We have worked to develop international support for its economy. We produced a package initially of \$27 billion from the international financial institutions, the Europeans, and others. We are working now, as you know, to add—

Senator JOHNSON. We covered that ground. What was the reaction? Did it have any effect whatsoever on this administration's attitude?

Mr. BLINKEN. You asked at the outset, Senator, Do we go back? do we revisit things? do we rethink things? The short answer is "Yes," we do, almost literally every single day. As I noted earlier, we provided a significant amount of security assistance to date, more than \$100 million. Again, it is beyond the blankets and the MREs. It really is things that matter in the field to the Ukrainians, as well as technical advice, assistance, et cetera.

That said, as I said earlier, we are continuing to look actively every day at other forms of assistance, including defensive lethal assistance.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay. Let us shift to ISIS and Iraq. I happen to believe it is a historic blunder, a strategic blunder, not leaving a stabilizing force behind in Iraq to be the glue to hold that coalition together. What was your reaction in January 2014 when you heard President Obama basically imply that ISIS was a JV team? Did that surprise you, that the President of the United States would say something like that?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I think as I recall the context of those comments was a distinction between terrorist groups that were fo-

cused inwardly and did not have an agenda that planned to attack the United States or, internationally, that did not have an international jihadist agenda and were focused primarily on their own countries. That was the distinction that was being made in that context. That is my recollection of it.

Senator JOHNSON. My recollection is you had the President of the United States trying to minimize the threat of a group like ISIS. Were you aware of the threat, the growing menace, that ISIS represented to not only the region, but also to the world?

Mr. BLINKEN. Absolutely. Let me, if I can, just tell you a little bit about that. And we can certainly talk about the drawdown and withdrawal from Iraq at the end of 2011. I am happy to come back to that.

From the moment that we withdrew our troops from Iraq, we worked literally from January 2012 to work our way back in to help the Iraqis develop a more effective means to deal with what was then Al Qaeda in Iraq and became ISIL. We said to the Iraqis at the time: You are making a big mistake if you take your foot off the throat of AQI. At that time they were down. The senior leadership had been decimated, the Iraqis were feeling overconfident.

But the fact of the matter is at that point in their history they wanted America out of Iraq.

Senator JOHNSON. Do you agree that was a mistake, to not leave a stabilizing force behind in Iraq? Do you think that policy has worked?

Mr. BLINKEN. I believe that we tried to leave a stabilizing force, precisely because we thought that having the ability to help the Iraqis develop a more effective counterterrorism means was necessary going forward. From 2012 on, we started to work aggressively to help them build up their capacity to deal with counterterrorism. We worked with them on developing targeting cells, on bringing more intelligence in, on arming them more effectively.

The year 2012 was an exercise in frustration. They did not see the problem. We pushed it. I worked with David Petraeus, who was CIA Director at the time, to do that. The Arab League summit came around in March 2012. We said: We will bring you ISR—intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance—to help protect the summit, and we thought that was a means to get better eyes on what was going on in Iraq, including the al-Qaeda threat. It became public. They would not do it.

But let me just quickly tell you what happened after that; 2013 rolled around and all of a sudden the Iraqis began to be seized with this problem because they saw ISIL emerging in Syria and spilling over into Iraq. They saw that they had a problem that we had been warning them about for more than a year. For a year starting in 2013, we led an effort and I led an effort to make sure that we were getting to the Iraqis the equipment they needed, the technical advisers and assistance they needed, the targeting cells, the ISR. We started to work with Congress on getting them more. And throughout 2013 I led 14 meetings of the Deputies Committee on that very issue. We were seized with this before ISIL was in the public eye.

Senator JOHNSON. Just one quick question. When you lay out a goal to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIS, do you think it is wise to signal to your enemy what you may or may not do to accomplish that goal? In other words, no combat troops on the ground. Do you think that is wise to signal? Whether you intend to do it or not, do you think it is wise to signal that to your enemy?

Mr. BLINKEN. What we have focused on in designing this campaign to deal with ISIL is a comprehensive effort that works on a military line of effort, but also dealing with the foreign financing, dealing with the fighters, dealing with the ideology.

On the military piece, we believe that it is not necessary and indeed it is not sustainable to have a repeat of what happened a decade ago, which was to have a large and indefinite American deployment of forces into Iraq or anywhere else to deal with this problem. What we believe is more effective and more sustainable is to strongly support a partner on the ground with air power, with intelligence, with training and equipping, with advisers, and they will then do the fighting to fight for the future of their own countries.

I believe that in Iraq we have the foundation and the makings of being able to do just that. We are working on the same thing in Syria. We believe that is the most effective and sustainable way forward to deal with the problem.

Senator JOHNSON. But taking—

Senator KAINE. I am sorry. Senator Murphy.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

We have got votes on the floor, so I am going to try to be brief. A couple questions. Thank you for your service, Mr. Blinken. Long days, long nights. It is not going to get any shorter in your new capacity.

I want to ask you a quick question about your new job. You have done a good job of defending the administration's policy here this morning. Mark Mazzetti of the New York Times wrote a brilliant book a couple years back about the massive buildup of military capabilities at our covert agencies and the great frustration that exists at elements of the State Department when they are trying to conduct diplomacy abroad—he specifically was writing about a period from 2010 to 2012 in Pakistan—when they do not know what is coming at them from secret drone strikes in that instance, but other activities in other parts of the world.

We find the same frustration here when we are trying to evaluate whether or not we should authorize an overt arming and training of Syrian moderate rebels and we ask the question, well, what have we learned from the activities that have been openly reported thus far, we cannot get that information.

It strikes me that we have seen a massive outsourcing over the last 10 years of diplomacy from the State Department to the military and a substantial outsourcing of military activity from the Department of Defense to the CIA and to covert authority. You are moving from having an umbrella view of all of those activities to now a narrower window within the State Department, and I think you will find many people in that agency who have some serious questions about whether they can do their job when you have this

level of activity occurring without oversight from the State Department or from this committee, which is charged with overseeing American foreign policy.

I would love your thoughts about what mentality you are going to bring to the State Department, having viewed this in a more robust lens at the National Security Staff?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I think that is a very important question and it is one that we grapple with literally every day. Part of my responsibility right now in my current job—indeed, it is at the heart of the responsibility—is to bring the entire interagency together on any problem, to make sure that not only is every perspective and voice heard, but to make sure indeed that each agency and Department knows what the other is doing.

So when we have a meeting of the so-called Deputies Committee that I chair, not only is every agency there that is relevant to the question; we bring in, thanks to video technology, our ambassador from the field. We bring in, as appropriate, the station chief in the field. We bring in the relevant combatant commander or general in the field, precisely because we want to make sure that everyone knows and has full visibility onto what everyone else is doing, and to make sure that the appropriate departments and appropriate agencies and appropriate actors are the ones carrying out the appropriate responsibilities. That is something that is essential to the proper functioning of our government and our foreign policy, and it is something that I focus on every single day.

If I am confirmed and move over to the State Department, I will get to move one seat down on that table, off of the chairman's seat and one seat down. But I will continue to bring that perspective to bear on those deliberations, because what you pointed to is vitally important and it is the only way we can function effectively. Our ambassadors have to know what is going on from other agencies. The other agencies need to know what our diplomacy is doing. That kind of communication, coordination, if it does not happen it does not work.

Senator MURPHY. I would just argue for a historical realignment whereby diplomats are doing diplomacy, our warfighters are doing what they do best, and that our covert agencies are gathering intelligence. They have always done operations, but this is a pretty unprecedented scale.

Just one question on Russia and Ukraine. All of the conversation has been about—most of the conversation on this committee has been about whether we arm or whether we do not arm the Ukrainians. But it seems to me a lot of the conversation misses the broader picture, which is that Russia is employing a set of tools that is unprecedented. Somebody referred to a new phrase I had not heard of yesterday, that Russia has militarized information. They are using information, propaganda, payoffs, support for NGOs, in a way that we have no understanding of and no ability to match.

Now, we do not necessarily want to go tit for tat, but instead of spending all this time talking about what specific arms we are going to give to the Ukrainians, we should be paying attention to what Russia is doing today in Latvia, in Estonia, in Serbia, in Montenegro, to essentially try to prep the next set of crises. Hopefully, this committee will be able to grapple with the need to have a

much more robust conversation about how we meet those new Russian tactics.

Hopefully, I think you understand that, but it would be great to see some real proposals coming out of the State Department, some new innovative proposals about how we revamp programs like Radio Free Europe so that it has any semblance of a chance to match up against what the Russians are providing in the periphery of their area of influence.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, let me just say very briefly that that is something that, if confirmed, I would welcome working with you and other members of this committee on. You are exactly right, Russia has a panoply of asymmetric tools to wield influence in countries on its periphery, and we see that every day in the Baltics. We obviously see it in Ukraine and Georgia and Moldova. We see it in the Balkans and places farther flung.

For us to be effective, we have to be focused on that as well, and indeed we are. It is something we welcome working on with you. We have—just a small point on this, and in the context of Ukraine, we immediately stood up an effort that our Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy, Rick Stengel, has been running to work on countering the messaging, which is very, very strong and effective. You know the Russian propaganda machine at home. That is something we are working on very vigorously every day.

But the larger point that you make, this is an area where I think we could very profitably work together and I welcome doing that if confirmed.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Blinken, on March—oh, by the way, over the weekend I was at a seminar, a panel with former Secretary Gates, former Secretary Panetta, and also former National Security Adviser Mr. Hadley. All of them strongly disagree with every one of your assertions here, particularly about the diminution of American power and influence throughout the world, including the fact that they said again, including Ryan Crocker, one of the most respected members of the diplomatic corps, have all said the administration could have succeeded in keeping United States troops in Iraq after 2011 if it had been more creative and determined. You and I had that discussion in my office and you made some assertions which are just patently false, which was very disappointing to me.

In March 2012 you said: “What is beyond debate is that Iraq today is less violent, more democratic, and more prosperous and the United States more deeply engaged there than at any time in recent history.” I vehemently disagreed with that at the time. So did the rest of us. Now, will you admit you were wrong in that assessment?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, at the time—

Senator MCCAIN. Yes or no, will you admit that you were wrong with that assessment?

Mr. BLINKEN. At the time I made that—I stand behind the words I said at the time. I think they accurately reflected where we thought—

Senator MCCAIN. Even though we knew, we knew, that if all the troops were going to be removed that the ensuing situation would evolve, and predicted it. And you were celebrating the fact that we had no more troops left in Iraq. You celebrated it, and so did the President: the last troop, combat troop, has left.

By the way, the Baghdad chief of the New York Times said the administration was ignorant of reality, "and did not want to see what was really happening because it conflicted with their narrative that they left Iraq in reasonably good shape." You did not leave Iraq in reasonably good shape, Mr. Blinken, and the events afterward directly negated your assessment at the time. It is very disappointing to me that you will not even admit that you were wrong. You were wrong because you said you were leaving behind a prosperous and less violent, more democratic—and none of that—than any time in recent history.

Now, I would like to ask you some questions. Do you believe that we should be providing the Ukrainian resistance with weapons, with lethal weapons with which to defend themselves now? Not whether it is on the table or not. Do you believe we should be supplying them with weapons in order to defend themselves, yes or no?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, what I can say is I believe we need to consider that.

Senator MCCAIN. I am asking you whether you believe we should be giving them the weapons or not, Mr. Blinken, and that is a straightforward question.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, you will understand that the advice that I provide to the President—

Senator MCCAIN. I am not asking for your advice. I am asking you for your opinion. You are supposed to be coming before this committee and give us your views.

Mr. BLINKEN. My belief is that that can play a role potentially in deterring—

Senator MCCAIN. Let the record show, Mr. Chairman, that the witness would not answer the question. Now—

The CHAIRMAN. I will let the record reflect that the witness answered the question as he did.

Senator MCCAIN. Excuse me. He would not answer either in the affirmative or the negative in response. He would not answer in response to the question, the question I will ask one more time: Do you believe we should be supplying the Ukrainians with lethal defensive weapons, yes or no?

Mr. BLINKEN. And again, Senator, I believe that is something that we need to look at very actively.

Senator MCCAIN. After 4,000 dead and the country dismembered and 4,000 more Russian troops invading eastern Ukraine, and you think it is something that should be looked at. That is really quite interesting.

Do you believe that Bashar Assad is getting stronger now that we are attacking only ISIS in Syria?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I believe that as we work to build up the moderate opposition, as we make it a stronger counterweight not only to ISIL but to the regime, Assad will get weaker, his position will change—

Senator MCCAIN. But we are not attacking Bashar Assad, Mr. Blinken, and that is a fact. Are we?

Mr. BLINKEN. We are working to build—

Senator MCCAIN. Are we attacking or not?

Mr. BLINKEN. We are currently—no, we are not attacking Bashar Assad.

Senator MCCAIN. We are not attacking Assad?

Mr. BLINKEN. No, we are not.

Senator MCCAIN. At the end of September you stated: “The best way to deal with Assad is to transition him out so that the moderate opposition can fill the vacuum. That is what we have been working on.”

At the G20 over the weekend, President Obama was asked if he was actively discussing ways to remove President Assad as part of a political transition, and his response was “No.”

Are we working to transition Assad out or not?

Mr. BLINKEN. We believe, the President has said repeatedly—I am not sure the exact words that you are referring to, but I have heard him say repeatedly—

Senator MCCAIN. It is fairly simple. He said “No.”

Mr. BLINKEN. Assad has lost his legitimacy. There is no way going forward that Syria can be stable with Assad in power. So what we have been looking—

Senator MCCAIN. So the President was incorrect, when asked if he was actively discussing ways to remove Bashar Assad as part of a political transition, and his answer was “No”?

Mr. BLINKEN. The President has been focused and consistent on the effort to support the moderate opposition, to build it up as a counterforce, to change the dynamic so that we can get to a political transition that winds up removing Assad.

Senator MCCAIN. Mr. Blinken, you quite often referred about the moral obligations and the standing of the United States of America. Do you believe that it is moral for us to train Syrians to go into Syria, in this case in Saudi Arabia, to go into Syria and fight, when we are not attacking Bashar Assad and Bashar Assad is intensifying his attacks on the Free Syrian Army? Is that moral?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, we have been working now for more than 3 years to support the—

Senator MCCAIN. Again, we do not answer the question. It is too bad that you can not answer straightforward questions, Mr. Blinken. I want to ask you whether you think it is immoral or not for us to send these young Syrians into an environment where they will be barrel-bombed by Bashar Assad.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thanks to the work that we have been able to do with you, with Congress, we are now—

Senator MCCAIN. You have done no work with me. You have done no work with me, Mr. Blinken.

Mr. BLINKEN. On the Train and Equip Program for the Syrian opposition—

Senator MCCAIN. You have not worked with me on anything.

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, that is something that we would want to do and relish doing.

Senator MCCAIN. After 6 years, you would want to do that. I thank you.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, could I just—if I could just add. We have been working with the moderate opposition for nearly 3 years. We have been working to build them up, give them support, give them greater means to defend themselves—

Senator MCCAIN. Mr. Blinken, when you say that it is very disturbing to me, because I know these people. I have been in Syria and I have met them. A lot of them that I have met with are now dead because we would not help them when the President of the United States said “No” to the recommendation of his Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and head of the CIA to provide arms to them. A lot of them have died. And we did not do all of those things you are saying, and there is ample proof by the fact of the situation that they are in today, which is probably more tenuous than it has ever been in history.

So again, I really take strong exception to hear you say something that I know, because I have been on the ground there, is not true. And I know these people very well. They feel abandoned. There have been many media reports, not just my reporting, but just a couple days ago in The Wall Street Journal. They feel abandoned and they have every reason to feel abandoned, and many of them are deserting to go to al-Nusra because they do not believe that they are getting any assistance.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, all I can tell you is from what I see, what I believe, what I know from what we have done. We have been working with them. We have been supporting them. We now have an opportunity, again thanks to the great work that has been done with Congress, to intensify and accelerate that effort, to give them even greater means to defend themselves, to defend their families, to defend their communities, to become a counterweight to ISIL, but also to become a counterweight to Assad.

We share the same objective. We would welcome continuing to work with you and deepen that and figure out a way to get it done effectively.

Senator MCCAIN. We know a way to get it done, Mr. Blinken. We have known it for a long time, a way to get it done, and we have articulated it time after time after time. And since that way was not pursued, we are now in the situation we are in today, whether it be Iraq or whether it be in Syria. Dividing Syria and Iraq into two different kinds of conflicts when we are fighting one enemy, of course, is bizarre.

One more point. I guess I am way over time. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. Just today we were meeting with some people who affirmed to us our belief, if you move everybody out of Afghanistan you will see the Iraq move again. Do you believe that we should leave a sustaining force in Afghanistan?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, to me the lesson for Afghanistan from Iraq is the need for political accommodation, what we did not get sufficiently in Iraq. At the time that I said the remarks that you referenced, I actually believed that we were in a position where Iraqis were working together politically within the confines of their constitution—

Senator MCCAIN. But you were wrong.

Mr. BLINKEN. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister chose to take Iraq in another direction. The foundation was there, the means



were there. It did not happen and that is something that unfortunately has stood Iraq in very bad stead.

But I believe one of the lessons we should draw from that—and you are right to focus on—is that, absent that kind of political accommodation and willingness to work together, it will be difficult to sustain all of the progress in Afghanistan. Happily, at least for now, we have in the new President, Mr. Ghani, the Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, a commitment to work together inclusively, to bring the country together, and to give the investment that we made in Afghanistan the chance to succeed, including the Afghan Security Forces.

We need to keep that investment going, we need to keep the financing going, and we need to support them in their efforts. If that happens, I believe—and of course we have two more years to continue in an aggressive way to help build up and develop the capacity of those forces.

Senator MCCAIN. Unfortunately, Mr. Blinken—the time has expired. Unfortunately, you will be wrong again. If we do not leave a sustaining force behind, Afghanistan will collapse and you will be wrong again.

I thank the chair.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair has allowed the Senator greater time than he allowed himself.

We have one or two colleagues who wish to come back and ask questions. We have a second vote. I think it is important not to close the hearing so that we can have them have their expressions of whatever questions they want to ask you.

I would like to take, before I have to go vote, a moment to ask you two quick questions. Hopefully, you can answer them quickly. One is, when the United States invaded Iraq who was the big winner?

Mr. BLINKEN. I think you could point to a few potentially. And you are talking about in 2003?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Mr. BLINKEN. I think certainly Iran benefited at the time. I think that arguably, unfortunately, al-Qaeda benefited because it was able to then develop a front in Iraq that it did not have. So there were some unfortunate consequences to that action.

On the other hand, thanks to the extraordinary sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, our diplomats, our civilians, whatever one thinks about the war and how it started and why it started, because of that sacrifice, because of that extraordinary effort over a decade, we gave Iraq a chance to succeed. We helped give it the institutions of governance. We helped create structures that could allow it to actually be something relatively unique in the region. And there was a moment, at least in my judgment, where people were actually working within the confines of the constitution and institutions, despite their tremendous differences, to move the country together. So—

The CHAIRMAN. And it is in that context that you made the comment that Senator McCain referenced?

Mr. BLINKEN. Yes. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. My own observation, as someone who voted against the war in Iraq, was that it was the biggest blunder that

we committed. We ended up, no weapons of mass destruction, no clear and present danger to the United States, no imminent threat, and the loss of so many lives and national treasure.

Now, we certainly cherish the contributions and the sacrifices made by American forces to ultimately liberate the Iraqi people. But at the end of the day, there is a lot of bad actors in the world. I can name a few that I would like to see go. You might imagine who is on the top of that list. And yet it is not in the national interest of the United States to necessarily pursue that course of action.

What we did is give Iran an opportunity for an ascendancy that creates challenges throughout the region. I just wanted to create context to your comments. And I have filibustered sufficiently to have Senator Kaine take the chair as I go to vote.

Mr. BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Blinken, for your service and your willingness to be here. What a position of honor your position will be. As a member of the committee, I visit a lot of countries and I always have meetings with FSOs, usually in their first or second term, to talk about their lives and their questions and their sacrifices. Sometimes they ask me about traffic in northern Virginia where they own property, but mostly we talk about the very serious issues that they deal with. What a wonderful bunch of people that you have worked with and you are going to continue to work with. So I will just start off by honoring them.

I think we do a pretty good job of acknowledging members of our military who serve now, but there are so many Americans abroad who are small "a" ambassadors, and we just need to thank all of them. So I think you are going to have a great opportunity to serve with wonderful people, and I know you know that.

Two thoughts on the AUMF process, and we talked a bit about this in the office. I do think it is a mistake for the administration not to have sent up AUMF language, because I think you are more likely to get an AUMF that you like if you send up language and you are less likely if you do not.

That being said, we are the article I branch. So I do not think there is any excuse for us not to do it and to do it with dispatch, and I hope we will. And I know we will work together on the terms of it.

So that is a critique. Let me now offer a compliment. Senator King and I visited the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar in early October to see the coalition in action. The administration—and it is both a military effort and a diplomatic effort, the efforts to pull together a meaningful coalition of nations who believe ISIL is a threat. It sounds good on paper and when you see it, it is even more impressive, the seamlessness of the coalition partners working together in the air strike campaign.

We were in a room that looked like the New York Stock Exchange, with big screens up, and folks from so many nations making hard decisions, but making them in an apparently seamless way. That was a month ago. It was highly impressive. So I know there is a lot of elements to this. The assembly of the coalition may be one of the most difficult, at least if the early evidence is an indication. We felt pretty positive about it, both Senator King and I. So I will offer that to you as a compliment.

One thing I would like to caution you, both in the State Department and all of us more broadly—and I would love to hear your response on it—is, do not let Iraq-Syria take our eyes off Afghanistan. We let that happen. I think we let that happen in 2003. I think we let it happen in 2006–2007.

I first was in Afghanistan in April 2006 as Governor visiting my Virginia Guards men and women who were serving there. I think it was the belief of a lot of the American both diplomatic and military leadership on the ground in Afghanistan at that point that Iraq was taking our attention away. The achievements that had been gained in Afghanistan as a result of American effort, diplomatic effort, military effort, had been significant—life expectancy advances, kids in schools. It is fragile under this new government. The formation of the new government is a huge tribute to your boss and to American diplomatic effort. But it is fragile.

While I am a supporter of an authorization for military action against ISIL in Iraq and Syria, I am mindful of the fact that we have turned our attention to one theater and then not paid the attention that was necessary. The Afghanistan situation is hopeful enough, but fragile enough, that if we turn our attention too dramatically to the events that are in the newspaper every day we run the risk of losing gains that have been achieved at an awful lot of sacrifice.

I would love to hear your thoughts on that.

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, what you have just said resonates in a very powerful way and it resonates because you said it in this room. A decade ago in this room, President Karzai sat where I am sitting today and he said almost exactly what you said. This was before the war in Iraq and he was testifying on Afghanistan, and he said: It is not my role necessarily to give the United States advice about what it should do or should not do somewhere else, but I ask you, whatever you do, do not take your eyes off Afghanistan. So what you just said seems to have resonated across the decade back into this very room, and I could not agree more.

Secretary Kerry, as you know, is intensely focused on this question. Had it not been for his extraordinary personal diplomacy, I am not sure that we would have gotten the accommodation that we saw between President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah. That is a tribute to, and triumph of, American diplomacy and his personal engagement.

Now, you are exactly right, we need to help sustain that, and we are. We are very focused on giving them the support that they need to continue to move the country forward in an inclusive way. That is very much a focus of the Secretary and of the administration.

Second, I think you are right to underscore this because we have to sustain the investment we have made in Afghanistan. We made a commitment to help develop the Afghan National Security Forces. We got other countries around the world to do the same thing. Countries made commitments and pledges in Chicago and Tokyo militarily, on the financial assistance side. Those have to be sustained.

In fact, if you look at the assessments that have been done, our analysis and the analysis of the intelligence community is the single most important factor in helping Afghanistan continue to move

forward is sustained support from the intelligence community. So we hear very much what you are saying. We agree with it, and I think there is a vital role that we can play together working with the committee to make sure that we are doing justice to that.

Senator KAINÉ. There were early signs of success in the coalition government—the signing of the bilateral security agreement, the signing of the status of forces agreement, the reinitiation of a criminal investigation into corruption of the Kabul Bank, the signing of a long kind of—dust was all over it—potential energy deal with Pakistan, indicating potential for opening up better ties there. So there were some good early signs.

But a sign that is still a troubling one is the difficulty in the formation of a Cabinet. I know that the Afghan leadership is going to be going to a donors conference in London in early December, and I am sure the donors are going to pepper them with questions about that. The United States played such a key role in the diplomatic rapprochement between President Ghani and Executive Abdullah. That was key. I think there is going to be diplomatic roles to play in some steps along the way, including in this, in the formation of the government, because I can not imagine that conversation with the donors will go very well if they walk in and there is not tangible evidence of real progress toward the formation of an inclusive government.

Mr. BLINKEN. And we have made exactly that case to them.

Senator KAINÉ. Great.

So many other questions have been asked; numerous questions about Iran. Just one point about Iran. I think it was Senator Risch who said he had been a harsh critic of the administration or just a critic of the administration's proposal on the interim deal in the JPA. I was actually a real supporter. But I may be as hawkish on the ultimate, the big deal.

I really felt like the interim deal had to be done. There had to be an interim phased approach that was trust-building because of the lack of trust between the parties. When there is a situation that is just fundamentally characterized by lack of trust, the only way you get to a better place is to test each other out in small things and see if the tests are passed enough to move on to larger things.

So the interim deal, a huge supporter. But you are going to—you said you cannot say where it is going to go, but it is going to be one of three paths. It is either going to be a deal—then we will talk about whether it is a good or bad deal. If it is going to be no deal, that would be relatively clear. Unfortunately, we have to figure out the consequences. Or it is going to be some request for additional time to put it together. I think the body will be pretty tough on that. To the extent that the toughness of Congress is at all lost on the negotiators on the Iranian side, I know that our team over there will disabuse them of that notion as you are in the final phases before November 24.

Last thing; just a thought. I am over time, but, hey, I am the last guy with questions, so I can easily do this. Something I would like you to kind of respond to. We focus our energy, as we often should, as we should, on the problematic areas. We ought to focus our energy too, and you should, in states and areas where things are ac-

tually moving in a positive direction, try to shine a spotlight on them, try to encourage others to do the same.

In the first Arab Spring country, Tunisia, that I recently visited, the United States has played an important role and there have been important both parliamentary and now upcoming Presidential elections. That could be a significant success story of positive movement in the Arab world that I think should be an important area.

The United States-India relationship—you and I talked about this—I think is entering a new phase, for a variety of reasons, where there is a huge up-side opportunity on economic cooperation and trade, on military cooperation, on cooperation on cyber issues. There are a number of instances of economies and countries in Latin America. There are some that are going bad. We have had questions about Venezuela certainly, but there is also some very positive examples.

Let us not have all of our diplomacy or all of the energy of leaders like you be around the crisis zones where things are going bad. One of the ways you help things go better in places where they are going bad is to shine the spotlight on where they are going well and try to extract the lessons and use them, so lessons from Plan Colombia that can be used in Central America or lessons in Tunisia that can be used in other nations in northern Africa like Algeria as they probably approach a governmental transition within the next 5 or 10 years.

So I would just encourage you in that, and if you have any thought about that I would love to hear your response.

Mr. BLINKEN. Well, I appreciate very much that you just did put the spotlight on a number of very positive developments, ones where we have been working very hard, sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes quietly, supporting, providing assistance, giving advice, in just those ways. I think we have seen the United States-India relationship that you just pointed to come a remarkable distance. It started with the end of the Clinton administration. The Bush administration did a tremendous job in carrying the relationship forward, and now we have just had the extraordinarily successful visit of Prime Minister Modi here to the United States and an agenda that is working across virtually every issue of importance to us with India that we are carrying forward. There again, it is something where I think we could work together very, very profitably in the months ahead.

Latin America as well. Extraordinary success stories. We have seen countries make fundamentally important decisions about their macroeconomic policies that have been to their benefit, improving governance, dealing with security challenges with the assistance of the United States, including in Colombia, Mexico, now other places. There, too, is a lot to work with, to work for, and to work together on.

The long and short of it is I think you are exactly right that we should not lose sight of the good news, especially because if we can make sure that it actually gets deep-rooted, not only will that consolidate the good thing where it is happening, but, as you just said, it can serve as a model, lessons learned, inspiration for other places.

Senator Kaine. With the permission of the ranking member, just one other brief point before I hand it back to see if you have an additional round.

On the Latin America point, one of the things I have been struck by is, American foreign policy almost always has revolved around an east-west axis. We were worried about Europe, worried about the Soviet Union, worried about China. Even when we had a policy in the Americas, it has often really been a, well, we are worried about Europe in the Americas, so we have the Monroe Doctrine; we are worried about the Soviet Union in the Americas, so we are engaging in Truman Doctrine proxy activities there.

The concern in Latin America is often that they are a source of attention only upon a crisis. If there is undocumented kids coming to the borders in big numbers, we go and we work on that; those numbers abate, the attention kind of moves away.

But the reality of kind of the facts on the ground right now is Canada is our number one trade partner and Mexico is our number two trade partner. You could see foreign policy going on an east-west axis, but if you look at our economic activity it is probably much more north-south than it is east-west. If you look at who comes to this country, the origins of people living here, the languages that are spoken here, our cultural traditions are so oriented around the north-south axis.

I do talk—this committee, we will have meetings with heads of state of South American countries. They will tell us about the deep engagement of China in trying to do natural resource deals or trying to do things, and they will say that: We feel more cultural affinity with the United States, but we just do not see the level of engagement.

So I would just put that on your shoulders going into this position. Our economy is running north and south. The flow of people is running north and south. Our cultural traditions and heritages—we are a nation—next year is the 450th anniversary of the founding of St. Augustine, FL. We have been a Hispanic nation 42 years before Jamestown. But we do not make that a primary focus of our foreign policy, and I would just encourage you and your colleagues at the State Department to take advantage of the opportunities that seem to be low-hanging fruit in the hemisphere.

Mr. Blinken. I very much appreciate that, Senator. If I could just maybe say a very brief word to address it, because, first, I know from my conversations with the Secretary that this is something that he is personally very focused on. We have a very dynamic Assistant Secretary of State who I know, Roberta Jacobson, who does an amazing job every day.

But it is also something that the President and Vice President have been intensely focused on. The President has made six trips to Latin America as President. Just this year in 2014, because this is something I was able to witness, he received in the Oval Office the heads of Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Uruguay. He visited Mexico. And the Vice President has been a human dynamo on 8 trips to the region, 10 countries, constant phone engagement.

We have worked, as you know, to advance free trade agreements with Colombia, with Panama. We have established, precisely to

your point, economic dialogues with countries that are emerging in a big way—Mexico, Brazil. We have the Caribbean Security Initiative which is vitally important there. And of course there have been the responses to the crises as well—Haiti and then the unaccompanied children.

Then there is a very other important component to this. There is a very dynamic exchange component. We have 100,000 strong in Latin America and we have 72,000 students from the region studying in the United States today. That is an increase of about 8 percent over the previous year. We have 43,000 Americans studying in Latin America, which is also an increase.

So we think you are exactly right and we want to work on all of these different lines of effort to maximize the relationships, strengthen them. When you look at countries like Chile, like Peru, like Colombia, like Mexico and others, there is an extraordinary foundation for progress. And of course, if we are able to get the Trans-Pacific Partnership done, that, too, will further deep-root that progress.

Senator Kaine. Senator Menendez is returning. I am going to hand it back to him. Mr. Blinken, thank you for your testimony today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Thank you, Senator Kaine. I appreciate it.

Senator Coons, when he gets accommodated, will be next, and then, depending upon whether any other member up or not, we will be closing the hearing. Senator Coons.

Senator Coons. Thank you very much, Chairman Menendez. Thank you for holding this hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Blinken, for long and honorable service to this Nation, your 6 years as staff director here on the committee and your very capable and dedicated service in the Obama administration and to my own home State, Vice President Joe Biden.

I also want to thank, in passing, Bill Burns as well, who has served very well as Deputy Secretary and is an accomplished Foreign Service officer. We thank him for his 33 years of service to our country.

If I might, Mr. Blinken, first an issue of particular interest to me, in part because I chair the Africa Subcommittee, in part because of its strategic importance for us, is the concern about failed states, about states—and I will just mention two—Somalia and the Central African Republic, where in one instance we had for nearly 20 years a complete collapse of centralized control or authority, and as a result real threats to regional and global security, and the other where there is an ongoing and significant humanitarian crisis.

Tell me how you think we might together get ahead of the issue of failed states around the world, and what is the proper mix between sort of economic and security and political initiatives to regain governance and to move forward in human rights and to secure and stabilize failed states in the region and the world?

Mr. Blinken. Senator, thank you for your leadership on this, for your work on this. I think you have identified one of the principal challenges we face, because we see again and again that where we

face problems one of the things that is at the root of the problem is a failure of a state, is the failure of governance, is the failure of institutions.

We have seen the incredible hope generated by, for example, the Arab Spring. But then, translating those hopes and aspirations on the street, into the institutions that can actually guarantee the rights and opportunities that people are clamoring for is a huge and indeed generational challenge, because unfortunately this does not happen overnight. So what we have tried to do—and you can go across the board. We talked about Tunisia a little bit earlier. We have now the great challenge in Yemen.

I think what you pointed to is essential, that in many of these places we have to take and we are taking a comprehensive approach to the problem. Often there is a military component because there may be a challenge from an insurgency, from a terrorist group. We have to help these countries develop the means and the capacity to deal with those problems.

But that is not sufficient. Unless we are able to help them develop the institutions of governance that give their people a sense that they can advance their interests through the democratic process, it is not going to work. Unless we can help them create institutions and economies that can actually deliver for people in their daily lives and that gives them the means not only to subsist, but to move forward, it is not going to work.

So I think what you alluded to is the need to look at these problems comprehensively to bring all of the different components of our government to bear on these problems, and to do it in a coordinated way, because what we do know is that if—and I know that, especially after a decade where our country has been engaged in two wars, with a large deployment of forces, that some people say, well, maybe this is a time to be a little bit less engaged. I think the answer is it is not. It is actually a time to be more engaged. But the question is how should we be engaged and how can we be engaged in a sustainable way that can actually help lift up some of the countries that are under challenge?

I think, for example, that the large-scale indefinite deployment of American forces is something that obviously would be a challenge to sustain. Developing the capacity of our partners to work on these problems is a more sustainable way to do it.

Similarly, as we look at the development agenda, we have the development goals that now need to be brought forward beyond 2015 and to work on those. The Bush administration created an extraordinarily powerful mechanism in the Millennium Challenge Corporation that has done remarkable work, and this is something that we have continued.

So it is a long way of saying that as we think about our engagement we have to address this question of failed states, but we have to figure out ways to do it that are sustainable, that we can keep going, that we can resource, and that we can bring all of government to bear on. Of course, I should add, the private sector and other sectors are absolutely critical. This summer, something that you played a leadership role in, the Africa Leaders summit, we brought to Washington, as you know, an extraordinary gathering of African leaders, and we worked with them to help unleash more



growth in Africa, also to deal with security challenges, institutional challenges.

A key component of that was bringing the private sector to the table and helping to strengthen those relationships. Power Africa is a wonderful example of the government and the private sector working together to help people in a meaningful way and to help economies develop a foundation that can carry them forward and actually prevent government failure, failed states, and so forth.

So there is a broad agenda there. This committee has done extraordinary work on it to date. If I move over to the State Department, that is something that I would welcome working with the chairman on, working with you on, and other members.

Senator COONS. I could not agree more. As you know, last night was the Millennium Challenge Corporations 10th anniversary event. I have had the opportunity to visit a half dozen states in Africa where they have made a real difference, and I think bringing the energy and the resources of the private sector, whether through AGOA, through the Partnership for the Future, or through MCC, to bear in making progress is critical.

I also just want to make sure that you are keeping in mind, that we all keep in mind, democracy, and civil society. On the continent of Africa at least, there are a half-dozen countries where leaders are seeking to change the constitution to extend their terms, to avoid the accountability of free, fair, and open elections. I think that is something we have to balance as well.

Mr. BLINKEN. Absolutely.

Senator COONS. You have been here a long time. So although I have many questions and I am confident you would answer them, let me just ask a last question if I could. Given your almost unique role as having served significantly here and now in the Executive Office and now going—of the President—and now going to the State Department, how can we improve communication, collaboration, and relationships, between this committee, this body, the Senate, and the White House?

Mr. BLINKEN. I actually think it is in a sense pretty simple, and it goes to something that Chairman Menendez talked to me about last week and something I feel very strongly about. That is giving real meaning to the word “consultation.” I heard the chairman loud and clear. I also heard from Ranking Member Corker on this. I think we can always do a better job and I am determined to do a better job, if confirmed, in making that word mean what it means, which is not inform, but actually consult, work together, have a dialogue, try and develop these policies together. There will be places, obviously, where we disagree, as any executive and legislative do. But it is my conviction, from having spent 6 years here, having spent 13 years in the executive, that it sure works better when we are working together, and it does not work if we are not communicating and communicating in a meaningful way.

So I heard the chairman on that loud and clear. I am determined to do that if I am confirmed.

Senator COONS. I could not agree more, and whether it is the AUMF and the conflict with ISIS, the potential agreement with Iran and concerns about our vital ally Israel and our safety and se-

curity, the Rebalance to Asia, or the things we talked about in Africa, all of these, we are much more likely to be successful together.

Thank you for your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for making it possible for me to come and question. And I may not be the last.

Thank you so much for your testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you. I apologize.

Thank you. Good to see you. I appreciate your time, and I will be brief. I know we have votes going on as well.

I have two followup questions. I understand you have already spoken about the issue of Venezuela. My understanding is, just to clarify on sanctions against government officials that are responsible for human rights violations or corruption, the administration's position, it is now willing to cooperate or be helpful in terms of sanctions legislation?

Mr. BLINKEN. That is correct, Senator.

Senator RUBIO. Can I ask, would the administration consider doing some of those things directly? They do have authority to take some of those actions. They already have with regards to the visas. Is that something that is being contemplated?

Mr. BLINKEN. That is something we would very much like to work on with you. As you know, we took the actions that we took this summer, indeed consulting with you on that, in terms of the visa restrictions that we did. As we had a brief opportunity to discuss, we have been focused on trying to see if our partners in Latin America could actually get results in terms of the opposition's agenda—getting people out of jail, advancing progress on the electoral commission, et cetera. I think, unfortunately, to date the effort has not borne fruit, which is why we think that working with you on what you have been proposing is something that we should do.

So certainly, if confirmed, and even if not, in my current capacity, I would welcome having that conversation and working on that with you.

Senator RUBIO. Then on the issue of Colombia briefly. As you are well aware, they have been negotiating, the government has been negotiating with the FARC over a potential peace agreement. That, of course, has been suspended because of the kidnapping of a Colombian general. One of the issues that arose during my recent trip there is that there may come a point where as part of those negotiations the FARC is asking that people currently in custody in the United States be released early, that their sentences be commuted. Can we rule that out now to make sure that it is clearly understood that that is not something the administration would ever support doing?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, what I can tell you is this. As you know, we are not a party to the negotiations, so we would have no requirement, whatever they negotiate, to send anyone back. We are obviously a strong ally of Colombia, as we strongly support the process, and as we go forward, if they call on us to play a role—and again, because we are not part of the negotiations, there is nothing we would be required to do—obviously I would commit, and I do here, to consult very closely with you about anything that

the Colombians may ask for in the future if something actually materializes in terms of a final deal.

Right now, as you know as well as I do, they are not there. We had the very unfortunate kidnapping of the general this week, and we are strongly supporting their efforts to try and carry this forward. But this is something, if the Colombians ask things of us, we would work with you to see what should be done.

Senator RUBIO. Then my last question is: As you know, the current sanctions that exist toward Cuba have been codified via the Helms-Burton legislation and other previous pieces of legislation that have passed, that have been enacted in the past. Absent Cuba meeting the requirements of that legislation, do you anticipate during the rest of the President's term that there will be any unilateral change or any change in the United States sanctions or conditions against Cuba absent them meeting those conditions of democracy, human rights, and so forth, the things outlined in that legislation?

Mr. BLINKEN. Senator, I think on Cuba let me just say a couple things if I could. First, I think we share strongly an understanding, and one that you have firsthand, of the nature of the regime. It has been an imprisoned island all my life, literally. I actually remember my parents talking to me about Cuba, that they had been able to visit in the 1950s before it became an imprisoned island. And of course, we know exactly what is going on today, the detentions, the harassment, the police state.

I think the question is—and I know we had a brief opportunity to discuss this—I think we all believe that change almost by definition will come, has to come, and the question is how do we best help the Cuban people prepare for that change. I know there are differences of views on the best and most effective way to do that in terms of getting them information, getting them resources, et cetera.

But to cut to the chase, obviously anything that might be done on Cuba will have to be consistent with the law; and second, anything that in the future might be done on Cuba would be done in full consultation, with the real meaning of the word "consultation" that I just alluded to, with this committee.

Senator RUBIO. I guess my point is there has been some chatter—and I understand some of it is just chatter, as happens in this town—that somehow in the next couple years, at the end of his term the President may seek to make some changes, perhaps even unilaterally, toward United States sanctions and policy toward Cuba, as some have advocated for. Is that being contemplated absent a real democratic opening?

Mr. BLINKEN. I think you know that the President has views on how to try to help move Cuba in a democratic direction, to help support people moving in that direction. If he has an opportunity, I am sure that is something he would want to pursue. But it depends on Cuba and the actions that they take. What we have seen, as I just alluded to, are actions in exactly the wrong direction—the detentions, the harassment. They talk about wanting to improve relations. They have, as you and the chairman know so well, Alan Gross, an American citizen, who is now in his fifth year of detention. You know, when you say you want to improve relations and

you are unjustly imprisoning an American, never mind what you are doing to your own people, that is usually problematic.

Senator RUBIO. I guess the only thing that concerns me—and I understand that perhaps you need to consult with them further. But the only thing that concerns me is I have not heard you say point blank that, absent democratic openings, we are not going to see actions on the part of this administration to weaken the current embargo and sanctions against Cuba.

Mr. BLINKEN. At least in my judgment, unless Cuba is able to demonstrate that it is taking meaningful steps to move forward, I do not see how you move forward in the relationship.

Senator RUBIO. When you say “move forward,” move forward on democratic reforms, not simply economic reform.

Mr. BLINKEN. Not simply economic reform.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let me thank you. Let me just say on this last topic, in which I obviously have a fair amount of interest, you know, going ahead—and Cuba is the only country in the Western Hemisphere that violated U.N. Security Council resolutions and sanctions in sending military equipment to North Korea. Yet we were relatively silent about that. If any other country would have done it, we would have been totally driving at the U.N. A different set of circumstances, they received no consequences.

Cuba does not meet the standards that the Summit of the Americas leaders set forth when it said that “The maintenance and strengthening of the rule of law and strict respect for the democratic system are an essential condition”—“an essential condition”—“of our presence at this and future summits.” Clearly, Cuba does not meet that standard.

Cuba has an American citizen held hostage who did nothing but try to help the Jewish community in Cuba communicate with each other. And yet it wants to hold him hostage in return for Cuban spies, who were not benign spies—they were spies who were spying against our Defense Department, one of which integrated the Defense Department, Belen Ana Montes.

So I could go down a long list in addition to the human rights, which sometimes I think we cavalierly say, yes, there is detentions. Not there is detentions. There is arrests in which people are detained for long periods of time, years, simply because that which we enjoy in America they try to seek to exercise—free speech, protests. There are individuals, like the Ladies in White, who just every week march with a gladiola peacefully to church dressed in white to protest peacefully that their sons and husbands are in jail for no legal reason, and they are savagely beaten.

Sometimes we sort of gloss over all of this. This administration in its speech, when it started this administration at its inaugural speech, talked about opening up the hand to those who are willing to take it, and the clenched fist. Well, the administration has unilaterally opened up the hand and done a series of things, including more visits, more money flowing to Cuba—not just residents—not just families of United States citizens, but anyone can send money to Cuba. The regime has received those moneys because they are the ones who control the economy in the command and control

economy on the island; and at the end of the day, the regime has not reciprocated one scintilla, but has become more repressive.

I could go on and on. So I understand Senator Rubio's concerns, because I heard them as well. Talk about the whole question of consultation versus notification. This is the epitome of notification, but not consultation. And there will be a very significant response if what we have is notification and not consultation at the end of the day.

I appreciate your answers before the committee. I have one or two that I am not going to delay, that I am going to ask you to respond in writing. I am concerned about Turkey, its presence in the exclusive economic zone in Cyprus, which I think is a belligerent move, unnecessary, and to the detriment of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, as well as to our negotiations there. But I will allow you to respond to that in writing for me.

This record will remain open until the close of business tomorrow. I would urge you, if you get questions, which undoubtedly you will, to answer them as expeditiously as possible so that when we return from the Thanksgiving recess there can be a business meeting to consider your nomination before the committee.

With that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:15 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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#### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

##### STATEMENT OF SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER IN SUPPORT OF TONY BLINKEN

Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Corker, I would like to express my support for Mr. Tony Blinken who was recently nominated to be the next Deputy Secretary of State.

Tony is a native of New York City (Yonkers), and after his childhood, Tony attended college at Harvard University and successfully graduated Magna cum Laude. He then went on to Columbia Law School and got his JD with the goal of practicing law. After a short stint in private practice, Tony found his passion for foreign affairs writing at the New Republic Magazine and the New York Times.

After his career in journalism, he served at the State Department from 1993 to 1994 as the Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, where he got his first taste of public service. Moving up quickly, he went on to work at the National Security Council under the Clinton administration for 7 years where he directed European Affairs and NATO policy.

After a year in the think tank world at the Center for Strategic and International Studies as a senior fellow, he came to the Senate where many of us worked closely with him on foreign affairs issues. He worked directly for this committee as the Democratic staff director during then Senator Biden's tenure as chairman and then ranking member. While holding this prestigious position for over 6 years, he organized hearings on Iraq in 2002 which helped spark a national debate before the war and played a key role in NATO enlargement and the civil nuclear agreement with India. He has traveled all over the world with Senator Biden and leading Republican Senators Lugar, Graham, and Hagel.

I want my friends and colleagues to know that Mr. Blinken, over the past several years in the administration, has acted with a cogency that denotes his extensive experience in handling flash points around the globe: Iraq, Russia, and the Middle East. As Deputy Secretary of State, no doubt these will be at the top of his portfolio.

As Assistant to the President and Principal Deputy National Security Advisor, he developed diplomatic relationships with multiple Iraqi governments in over 25 trips to Iraq; secured a deal on oil payments between the Iraqi Government, the Turkish Government, and Kurds; and chaired a series of high-level meetings in the region with senior leaders from Iraq, Jordan, the UAE, Turkey, and Egypt to help Iraq reintegrate with its neighbors.

On Russia—he was assertive up front, and kept his foot on the gas, pushing at each juncture to take steps to counter Russian aggression and their support of the rebels in eastern Ukraine.

And on the Middle East—Tony is a steadfast advocate for Israel's Iron Dome system. He was one of the first to jump and draft legislation to fund the system.

As the Deputy Secretary of State, Tony will come into this position with decades of foreign policy experience in dealing with the most important regions in the world, the ability to build bridges amid disagreement and dissent, and a sharp intellect to make sound policy decisions on complex issues. He is a well-known, successful, strategic thinker in the foreign policy arena. I give Tony my full support for his nomination and I urge my colleagues to support him as well.

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RESPONSES OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*Question.* European security also means energy security. Europe must diversify its supply and invest in its energy infrastructure. Greater regional cooperation, such as in the eastern Mediterranean, can help, but Turkey's provocations in Cyprus' EEZ are creating instability that puts at risk further exploration and the placement of projects that would benefit Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike.

♦ What actions have you taken and what messages have you sent about Turkey's decision to send its ships into Cyprus' EEZ?

*Answer.* I share your concern about recent developments and can assure you that the Obama administration remains strongly committed to a just and lasting settlement to reunify the island of Cyprus as a bizonal, bicomunal federation. If confirmed, I will reinforce our diplomatic efforts to achieve such a settlement. We support Cyprus' right to develop its resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and believe that the island's oil and gas resources should be equitably shared between both communities in the context of an overall settlement. Reducing tensions and getting the parties back to the negotiating table as soon as possible are critical to advancing the peace process.

The administration remains fully engaged with all stakeholders to reduce tensions over the EEZ and in support of United Nations Special Advisor Espen Barth Eide's efforts to move past the current impasse and resume negotiations. The Vice President spoke with President Anastasiades on October 31 and underscored our support for the Republic of Cyprus' sovereignty and right to develop resources in its exclusive economic zone, in keeping with customary international law. He also expressed our hope that all states in the region would pursue a mutually beneficial approach to developing energy resources. During the Vice President's November 21–23 visit to Turkey, he discussed with Turkish officials how Ankara can play a constructive role in defusing tensions and getting the talks back on track.

I appreciate your continued support of the settlement process. I assure you of the administration's unwavering commitment to resolving the long-standing division of the island, which we believe will enhance regional stability and prosperity, as well as improve the lives of all Cypriots.

*Question.* This summer, President Obama requested \$3.7 billion in supplemental funding to respond to the refugee crisis that developed on our southern border. Not surprisingly, this crisis came after years of U.S. disengagement and sustained cuts to our foreign assistance budgets for Central America and the Western Hemisphere at large. While both President Obama and Vice President Biden have met repeatedly with Latin American leaders in the wake of this crisis, robust and sustained engagement still is needed.

♦ Will you make the crisis in Central America a priority? And will you commit to working to increase foreign assistance budgets for the Western hemisphere, a region whose security and economic development have a direct impact on the United States and its citizens?

*Answer.* The short answer to both questions is "Yes."

The administration remains firmly committed to partnership in the Western Hemisphere. Our goal is to strengthen democracy, advance prosperity, and ensure security in a manner that benefits all citizens.

The U.S. Government is making new investments in Central America and will continue to make the region a priority. Since 2008, \$803 million has been appropriated for the Central American Regional Security Initiative. Additional investments, however, will be critical to respond comprehensively to the underlying factors that drive migration, particularly to advance prosperity and good governance.

Adequate resources for U.S. efforts in Central America will be critical to work collaboratively with partners in the region on shared objectives.

The administration's \$300 million FY 2014 emergency supplemental reflected a request for a downpayment on needs for Central America. We are committed to working closely with Congress to secure the resources necessary for Central America. The Department expects that the administration's FY 2016 foreign assistance request to Congress will reflect additional prioritization on Central America.

*Question.* I was pleased to see Secretary Clinton and now Secretary Kerry take steps to move the State Department toward a stronger emphasis on the economic dimension in our diplomacy. And a few years ago the administration laid out a plan to reorganize some of our trade and development agencies in the hopes of making these institutions better aligned and more effective. This is an area in which I believe there is much work still to be done.

♦ Could you please discuss the current status of the State Department's progress in these areas, and what additional steps you are planning?

*Answer.* Secretary Kerry has established a Shared Prosperity Task Force to strengthen economic diplomacy as a central tenet of our foreign policy priorities. The State Department needs to be on the front lines promoting America's economic interests and our vision of a rules-based, transparent, global economy that serves the needs and aspirations of our own citizens and benefits people worldwide. We call this economic policy agenda "Shared Prosperity," to convey that our focus on expanding trade and investment opportunities for American business builds the conditions for a more prosperous and secure world.

The Shared Prosperity Task Force has set up Four Working Groups focused on building systems and capacities to succeed in this existential task.

The Knowledge Platforms Working Group, which our Office of Management Policy, Rightsizing, and Innovation (M/PRI) leads, is working to ensure that all State employees have the information they need deliver on our economic agenda and to make relevant information more available across multichannel platforms. In the 21st century, all State personnel deserve current information in real-time, and through these platforms we will better capitalize on our opportunities.

Our Human Capital Working Group, which our Human Resources Bureau (M/DGHR) leads, is revamping Foreign Service Institute training to include "Shared Prosperity" modules in its class offerings, from A-100 and other orientation classes through ambassadorial training. This working group is leading an effort to expand interagency "detail" opportunities for State Officers (beyond USTR) to include the Treasury Department, Commerce Department, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the Office of Management & Budget.

Entrepreneurship is an essential element of American business culture, one which excites would-be entrepreneurs around the world, and offers opportunities to create jobs and more inclusive economic growth. Our Entrepreneurship Working Group is currently cataloguing and working to coordinate entrepreneurship initiatives that currently exist at the department.

The Jobs Diplomacy Working Group, which our Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs (EB) leads, is coordinating internally and with the interagency to be a more effective advocate for U.S. companies. This includes doing more to inform U.S. businesses of commercial opportunities abroad. In 2013, high-level State Department advocacy assisted with more than \$5.5 billion in foreign government contracts being awarded to U.S. companies.

Additionally, our posts conducted over 80 calls with U.S. businesses through our "Direct Line" program, which is tailored particularly for smaller U.S. companies that often face steep challenges operating in foreign markets. Since its inception in 2012, nearly 200 embassies and over 5,000 U.S. companies have participated in Direct Line calls and webinars.

Over the past year, the Department also launched the Business Information Database System to alert U.S. businesses to significant international commercial opportunities, populating it with over \$240 billion in leads.

Working with the Department of Commerce, we helped recruit over 1,300 attendees for the 2013 SelectUSA summit to attract job-creating foreign investment to the United States, and we have pursued an active trade policy agenda to expand opportunities for U.S. business in overseas markets. For instance, we helped to conclude the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and revive the WTO's Information Technology Agreement (ITA).

In the fast-growing area of digital commerce, the Department has led successful efforts to uphold the multistakeholder model of Internet governance and the ability of U.S. companies to operate across national boundaries.

We have made recent progress on market-opening aviation agreements with Mexico, Japan, and Ukraine and have worked to minimize commercial disruptions in other transportation markets.

The State Department and USAID have also helped U.S. business by providing critical support to partner countries in transition. For instance, we facilitated loan guarantees to key partners including Jordan, Tunisia, and Ukraine and led the multinational campaign that made 2014 the first year of full European Bank for Reconstruction and Development operations in the Middle East/North Africa region, with over \$1 billion in finance for Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Finally, the Department has helped pave the way for expanded U.S. economic ties with African partners, culminating in a historic U.S.-Africa Leaders summit in August 2014.

*Question.* Though there are signs of what may be a slow-down of the spread of Ebola in Liberia, the number of new cases in Sierra Leone is on the rise. And recent news about the confirmation of new infections in Mali was very troubling. The epidemic has already taken a severe human toll, and has had a significant economic impact on already fragile economies. Today, the World Bank issued a revised estimate of the short- and medium-term economic impacts, projecting that the region could see \$3-4 billion in lost GDP. This is a vast improvement over previous estimates; however, given the fragile nature of these economies and the poverty rates, this estimate is still worrisome. There are also possible political repercussions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

- ◆ How concerned should we be about political instability in West Africa as a result of the epidemic's continued spread?
- ◆ If confirmed, what role will you have in planning to mitigate such instability, and what steps will you recommend we take to support the governments in maintaining stability in affected countries?

*Answer.* Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea—the worst-affected countries—remain stable at this time. Mitigating the second order impact of the crisis is one pillar of our four-part strategy because both economic and/or sectoral decline will both impede the international response and render recovery a much longer process. We are responding at the community level, by providing food that we procure locally where possible and in order to prevent local market collapse, community care for families ravaged by the disease, and assistance, including bed nets, to address other urgent health requirements. Given the significant impact of the Ebola epidemic on the economies of the affected countries, we are working closely with and support the efforts of the World Bank and African Development Bank, and called for and have welcomed the International Monetary Fund's decision to provide debt relief in addition to grants and loans.

We must remain vigilant—there have been occasional security incidents pertaining to the Ebola outbreak. In Guinea, particularly in the remote Forrestiere Region, there have been incidents in which local communities have attacked officials and healthcare workers who were conducting outreach activities. Such attacks are likely fueled by a combination of fear and mistrust of government officials and outsiders. In Liberia, there have been localized incidents of unrest due to frustration over the failure of local authorities to collect bodies of the deceased or respond to requests for medical care in a timely manner. In the West Point neighborhood of Monrovia in August, the imposition of a quarantine led to violent protest that resulted in one death. While none of these countries have so far experienced widespread violence, protests, or instability, there is the risk that the ongoing crisis will fuel growing frustration, especially if the second-order effects on the economy, social fabric, and governance systems of these countries are not adequately addressed. If confirmed, I will ensure that our Embassies continue to monitor the security situation in West Africa carefully, and I will promote a whole-of-government effort to identify and address the potential drivers of instability, in close partnership with the governments of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. The administration, in cooperation with our international partners, will continue our effort to stop Ebola at its source in West Africa, which is what we need to do to end the global security and health threat posed by the epidemic.

*Question.* South Sudan.—It has been almost a year since conflict broke out in South Sudan. During that time, nearly 2 million people have been displaced, and 4 million face food shortages. Aid groups are unable to reach significant portions of the civilian population due to insecurity, and there are allegations of human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict. At a meeting during the U.S.-Africa Leaders' summit in August, I urged President Salva Kiir of South Sudan to work toward a political solution to this man-made crisis. The Office of the Special Envoy for Sudan



and South Sudan has been leading U.S. efforts on pushing peace between various factions in South Sudan, and the United States has imposed targeted personal sanctions on some of the key actors in the conflict. Unfortunately, a peace agreement remains elusive.

- ◆ How effective, in your estimation, have the targeted sanctions been to date?
- ◆ If confirmed, will you be recommending expanding the sanctions to other individuals?
- ◆ When the administration announced targeted sanctions earlier this year, the State Department informed Congress that these measures were part of an effort to regionalize, even internationalize, sanctions. Where does that effort stand? Does the administration support an arms embargo?

*Answer.* The United States has utilized its targeted South Sudan sanctions Executive order to designate four individuals to date, two from the Government of South Sudan and two from opposition forces. We will continue to use the authority under the Executive order to hold accountable those who commit human rights abuses or obstruct the peace process. We have made this intention clear to the international community, including to regional governments brokering peace talks, and to the leadership of both of the warring parties. Targeted sanctions have been a necessary and effective tool to demonstrate the importance that the U.S. Government places on resolving this conflict and our commitment to hold accountable those who undermine peace and security in South Sudan.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional leadership has requested that increased external international pressure be brought to bear on the parties. Our imposition of sanctions was followed by similar actions from the European Union and Canada. The next step is to press ahead with a U.N. Security Council resolution establishing a U.N. sanctions regime. This process is currently under negotiation at the United Nations. We are working to ensure a robust U.N. Security Council sanctions regime which will demonstrate the international community's resolve in helping end the needless suffering of millions of South Sudanese.

Going forward, the Council will continuously review the appropriateness of these measures in light of the situation on the ground. We are continuing to review additional options to increase this pressure, as appropriate. We have and will continue to use all available tools to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and we are doing so in the context of a broad international coalition.

*Question.* Nigeria.—When I met with President Jonathan during the U.S.-Africa Leaders summit in August, we spoke of three key issues: security in the north, national elections in 2015, and the need for widespread inclusive development, particularly in the north. Since our meeting, Boko Haram has continued its rampage. Recent media reports claim that 4,000–5,000 refugees a week are crossing into Cameroon due to insecurity. I am deeply concerned about the safety of the Nigerian people as well as the implications for elections in February.

- ◆ Please speak to the administration's elections assistance strategy and how it will be impacted by the unrest in the north. Do you believe Nigeria can credibly move forward in February if the State of Emergency remains in place in the north, and insecurity significantly suppresses participation in the three affected northern states?
- ◆ What is the U.S. strategy related to ensuring there is an inclusive development agenda in northern Nigeria, and what programs and activities should we be implementing to prevent and or counter violent extremism in Nigeria?

*Answer.* As Nigeria looks ahead to the February 2015 general elections, the United States strongly supports a free, transparent, credible, inclusive, and nonviolent electoral process. We have consistently called upon all Nigerians to refrain from advocating, fomenting, or condoning violence before, during, or after the elections.

We have also worked with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as they administer a vote in which Nigerians are free to voice their opinions and participate in the electoral process without fear of retribution. We have also emphasized publicly and privately to political party officials, elected leaders, and candidates for office that they have a special responsibility to uphold these democratic precepts.

The United States remains committed to working with Nigeria to strengthen its democratic institutions in the years to come. A peaceful election in February 2015 will constitute a major step in that process.

The United States is committed to supporting Nigeria as it addresses the violence caused by Boko Haram. At the same time, Nigeria must take a comprehensive approach to fighting violent extremism that brings both civilian and security tools to the fight and protects innocent civilians.

Helping Nigeria to address this threat is a long-standing effort. Most recently, over the past 6 months the United States started sharing some intelligence with Nigeria, began training a new army battalion and will consider training additional battalions, and held numerous high-level discussions with Nigerian authorities to explore additional measures. The United States, along with the United Kingdom and France, is working closely with Nigeria and its neighbors to establish a Multi-National Task Force to coordinate regional efforts against Boko Haram.

Through the recently launched Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF) we will provide \$40 million in assistance to Nigeria and its neighbors—Niger, Cameroon, and Chad—to train personnel in border security, command and control, and other best practices to counter violent extremism. The Fund also provides assistance for the justice sector, rule of law programs, and stabilization efforts.

We are working closely with Nigeria and its neighbors to help counter extremism through existing programs like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. We are also partnering with Nigeria through the President's Security Governance Initiative. Through these programs and initiatives we are helping the Nigerians to build up rule of law and to strengthen their security institutions. We will continue to seek other ways to assist Nigeria to counter Boko Haram and meet citizen security needs in the region.

USAID's programs targeting the Northeast of Nigeria include key elements of the U.S. Government's strategy to counter Boko Haram, and directly address the key, underlying drivers of the conflict. Humanitarian operations supported by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace are ramping up to respond to the escalating challenges posed by growing numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP). OFDA's programs address challenges related to health; logistics; protection; livelihoods; capacity-building of Nigerian emergency management institutions; food security; and water, sanitation, and hygiene. USAID's Office of Food for Peace is finalizing a first wave of programming to more directly address the unfolding food security issues arising due to the conflict. At the same time, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) is implementing an activity under its Support Which Implements Fast Transition (SWIFT) contract that will assist the Government of Borno State to build its capacity to respond to local needs. Complementing these emergency-response activities, USAID programming supports the delivery of urgent education services to IDPs and conflict-affected communities in the Northeast. As progress is made on these fronts, including on-ground security in the region, the mission intends to expand its local governance, health systems, and education systems programming into Borno State to help the state government make rapid advancements in its ability to deliver quality services to its citizens.

*Question.* President Obama recently made history by announcing a bold, joint climate commitment with China that is sure to reinvigorate international climate talks, but some in this body seem to think China needs to do little to meet their obligations. China's pledge on nonfossil energy will require roughly a trillion dollars in new clean energy investment or the equivalent of building one nuclear plant a week for the next 16 years.

◆ Do you think such a commitment is meaningless? And on the other hand, is it possible for China to attain?

*Answer.* The targets that China announced on November 12, 2014, are meaningful, ambitious and, we believe, attainable. China announced two major long-term commitments to address climate change: a goal to peak CO<sub>2</sub> emissions around 2030 and to make best efforts to peak early, and an intention to increase the share of nonfossil fuels in primary energy consumption from 15 percent in 2020 to around 20 percent by 2030, with current share estimated at around 10–11 percent.

China's first-ever announcement of a peak year for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is a milestone. Achieving this peak around 2030 or earlier will require significant additional action by China starting today. A range of experts—including the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Energy Information Administration (EIA), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Institute for Energy and Economics (Japan), and others—has projected that under current policies, China's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will peak around 2040 or even later. A recent MIT study conducted in partnership with China's Tsinghua University, for example, suggests that peaking Chinese CO<sub>2</sub> between 2025 and 2035 will require aggressive decarbonization policies equivalent to a carbon tax rising to \$38/ton in 2030.

China's commitment to achieve 20 percent of all energy from nonfossil sources by 2030 is also significant. We estimate that China will need to install 800–1,000 gigawatts of additional nuclear and renewable electricity generation capacity by 2030 to meet their goal. For reference, the entire U.S. generation capacity in 2012 was a bit less than 1,000 gigawatts. To meet its target, China will need to add

roughly 1 gigawatt of nonfossil electricity capacity to the grid every week between now and 2030. That's the equivalent of one nuclear power plant, 500 average-sized wind turbines, or 200,000 roof-top solar installations every week for the next 15 years. Achieving these commitments in the context of an economy growing as fast as China's will be challenging, and they will need to start immediately.

We expect that the targets China has set will be integrated formally into their 5-year planning process. We will be able to monitor progress through the biennial reports China is required to submit to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) every 2 years detailing action against international commitments. The administration insisted on these transparency provisions during the negotiation of the Copenhagen Accord to ensure that all nations could track each other's progress against targets.

This kind of parallel commitment by China is the type of action long called for by congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle to complement U.S. measures to reduce carbon pollution at home.

*Question.* Mr. Blinken, some are criticizing the President's recent pledge to commit \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund. Is this really all that different than President Bush's \$2 billion pledge to the Climate Investment Funds in 2008?

*Answer.* A U.S. contribution to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) builds on a history of strong U.S. leadership to fund critical efforts to combat climate change around the world, including the Bush administration's pledge of \$2 billion in 2008 to the Climate Investment Funds (CIFs). The CIFs are a set of World Bank trust funds created to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, and were designed as a transitional mechanism. The GCF builds on the work of the CIFs.

The United States has a compelling interest in enabling vulnerable countries to build resilience to climate change. More resilient communities are less likely to descend into instability or conflict in the aftermath of extreme climate events that would need more costly interventions to restore stability and rebuild. Building resilience also helps safeguard our investments in many areas, including food security, health, education, and economic growth. In addition, it is in our interest to help developing countries grow their economies in a way that minimizes dangerous carbon pollution.

The GCF will partner with developing countries to reduce their carbon pollution and strengthen their resilience. It will leverage private sector investment and help spur global markets in clean energy technologies, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs and manufacturers who are leading the way to a low-carbon economy, including those from the United States.

The U.S. pledge has succeeded in spurring other donors to step up to the plate. So far, a range of contributing countries as diverse as Japan, Germany, Canada, Panama, Mongolia, Mexico, and Korea has pledged a total of over \$9.7 billion to the GCF, with more pledges expected soon.

*Question.* China Maritime Security.—Although I was pleased by the Confidence Building Measures the United States and China agreed to last week when President Obama was in China, I remain concerned about Chinese actions and current trendlines on a range of security issues in the Asia-Pacific region: On Japan, China appears to be trying to use its differences with Japan as a wedge between the United States and an important ally, and even with the recent Xi-Abe (She/Ah-bay) meeting remains aggressive in its rhetoric and behavior toward the Senkakus. And in the South China Sea we continue to see provocative Chinese behavior, and seems intent on trying to coerce the nations of the region to force a resolution of these issues in a way favorable to PRC interests.

- ◆ What role should the United States play on these issues? Given China's new assertiveness, is our carefully calibrated balance between "cooperation and competition" still the right approach? Should we be demonstrating in more robust terms our enduring national interests in freedom of navigation, the free flow of commerce, and the peaceful resolution of disputes consistent with international law?

*Answer.* The United States is committed to freedom of navigation, respect for international law, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peace and stability in the South and East China Seas. The United States has also highlighted publicly and privately, most recently by President Obama during his visit to Beijing and at the East Asia summit and the U.S.-ASEAN summit in Burma, our growing concern over provocative unilateral activities undertaken by claimants to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas, such as ongoing land reclamation efforts in the South China Sea. The President stated last April that, while we take no position on the

issue of ultimate sovereignty over the Senkakus, we oppose unilateral attempts that would undermine Japanese administration of the Senkakus.

The United States supports regional stability and a rules-based system in the Asia Pacific through our robust diplomatic, military, and economic presence. We are deepening our alliances and security partnerships and have repeatedly made clear to all parties that we are fully committed to the defense of our allies. For example, we have signed a defense cooperation agreement with the Philippines, and, since the end of last year, we have committed additional funding for helping our partners and allies increase their maritime awareness and ability to patrol their waters. In particular, we are deepening cooperation with partners like Vietnam on improving maritime domain awareness and security, both through bilateral programs as well as in coordination with regional partners like Japan. In addition, we are working to support efforts by ASEAN to use regional consultations and institutions to establish and enforce rules of the road and a "freeze" or "moratorium" on provocative actions, as part of ASEAN's efforts to establish a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea.

The United States welcomes the rise of China that is peaceful, prosperous, and stable, and plays a responsible role in the world. In the U.S.-China relationship, we seek to expand our areas of cooperation and constructively manage our differences. I believe this approach serves the best interests of the United States and the region. The recently announced military-to-military confidence-building mechanisms (CBMs) are a step forward in helping to increase transparency and predictability, and to reduce risk of unplanned encounters between our two militaries.

*Question. China Cyber.*—Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a 31-count indictment against five members of the Chinese PLA for cyber economic espionage and other offenses that targeted five U.S. firms and a labor union for commercial advantage. This was the first time that the Federal Government has initiated such action against state actors. In the wake of this indictment China has withdrawn from the cyber dialogue and there seems to be little progress in seeking to engage China in discussing how to develop a responsible approach to cyberspace.

- ◆ What kind of dialogue do we currently have with Chinese on Cyber Theft? What are the next steps on this dialogue? What actions could we take if we discover state-directed theft of corporate or national secrets? Do you think the United States should initiate a case against China in the WTO for its cyber theft of U.S. trade secrets? Will PLA cyber espionage alter our current approach for influencing Chinese cyber behavior?
- ◆ As Deputy Secretary of State, and thus the lead U.S. official in the Strategic Security Dialogue at the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, how will you raise these issues with your Chinese counterparts?

*Answer.* Cyber security is one of the administration's top priorities. The United States remains deeply concerned about Chinese Government-sponsored, cyber-enabled theft of trade secrets and other sensitive business information for commercial gain. Although China suspended its participation in the Cyber Working Group, we continue to underscore with Chinese officials, at the highest levels of our government and through a variety of channels, that China's cyber-enabled theft of trade secrets remains a major irritant in our bilateral relationship. We will again raise our concerns with China during the December 3-4 meeting of the U.S.-China Joint Liaison Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation, which has its own cyber working group that is focused on cyber crimes such as online fraud. When we have evidence of such theft, the U.S. Government considers a range of diplomatic, economic, and law enforcement responses on a case-by-case basis.

Despite our differences with China over what constitutes acceptable behavior in cyberspace, we recognize that this issue does not define the totality of our cyber relationship. We remain committed to expanding our cooperation with China on cyber matters where we have common ground, and to candidly and constructively addressing differences. We use our engagements with China to emphasize U.S. cyber policy objectives, including the applicability of international law to state behavior, the importance of norms of responsible state behavior, concerns about cyber activities that can lead to instability, the role of transparency in domestic cyber policy, and the importance of practical cooperative measures to prevent crises in cyberspace.

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I intend to raise our cyber concerns with the Chinese at every opportunity, including at the Strategic Security Dialogue. Regular open and frank dialogue is crucial to building trust and developing common rules of the road on this important strategic issue.

*Question. Burma.*—The three most important issues playing out in Burma today are the plight of the Rohingya, the peace process, and the 2015 general election. In

all three, we see negative developments: the Government of Burma has already begun to implement an action plan that would place self-identifying Rohingya in internment camps indefinitely, while humanitarian organizations still do not have unhindered access to Rohingya; government cease-fire negotiators have backtracked on recent commitments, military officers have taken a front seat at negotiations, and the Tatmadaw is reportedly undertaking new campaigns in several border states; finally, the ruling party is pushing to change the electoral system to give it undue advantage, while one-sided restrictions on candidate eligibility and political campaigning remain in place.

♦ Given all of these negative developments, how should the United States recalibrate our policy to send a clear message to the Government of Burma that we do not consider the status quo to be acceptable?

Answer. Burma's reform process remains a work in progress. It is essential for the United States to remain engaged with the Government of Burma and with the people of Burma to help shape and facilitate a successful democratic transition.

Burma is now entering the 4th year of its transition from more than six decades of authoritarian rule. Undoing the legacy of the repressive military regime and building an inclusive and resilient democracy will not be easy, fast, or painless. We are clear-eyed that there is more to be done to ensure Burma's reforms stay on track.

President Obama expressed our deep concern about the situation in Rakhine State, in particular as it relates to the Rohingya population during his recent visit to Burma. In his meeting with Thein Sein just last week, President Obama called this issue Burma's "most urgent matter," noting the world is watching. The President urged a process in Rakhine State that provides humanitarian access for all those in need, particularly the Rohingya; does not hold or settle Rohingya indefinitely in camps; and allows the stateless to become citizens of Burma without having to self-identify as members of a group or nationality to which they do not believe they belong. He also emphasized that if the situation in Rakhine State continues as is or deteriorates further, it threatens to derail Burma's overall reform process.

While we understand that most international NGOs have been able to return to Rakhine State, many are at reduced capacity. We have urged the Burmese Government to allow humanitarian agencies, including Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), unimpeded access to all people in need of humanitarian assistance.

The Government of Burma has been working with ethnic armed groups to achieve a national cease-fire. The success of the peace process is essential to ensuring the success and durability of political and economic reform in Burma. We have encouraged continued dialogue among the government and ethnic armed forces to bring to a close more than six decades of conflict. We stand ready to assist the government and ethnic groups implement and monitor, once signed, a nationwide cease-fire agreement.

The United States urges all sides to commit to a policy of restraint and dialogue as the only path to genuine and lasting peace, stability, and development in Kachin State and in Burma as a whole.

The United States is watching closely the electoral process in Burma. The credibility of Burma's 2015 elections is of utmost importance to the development of Burma's democratic institutions and will serve as a critical marker in Burma's reform process. During the President's visit, Parliament rejected a problematic proposal to shift to a new, proportional representation electoral system.

President Obama strongly encouraged constitutional reform during his trip to Burma last week, consistent with previous U.S. Government statements on the issue. The government and military have repeatedly stated they would follow the "people's will" when considering constitutional amendments and a referendum would be one way to accomplish this. By codifying democratic norms into law, including through constitutional reform, the Government of Burma can demonstrate its commitment to the democratic reform process.

Constitutional reform should reflect the will of the people of Burma, and permit credible, transparent, and inclusive elections that enable the people of the country to pick the leader of their choice; address rights of members of ethnic minorities; and increase civilian control of the military.

If confirmed, I would continue to work with Burma to make progress on the reform process.

*Question.* North Korea.—Secretary Kerry has previously stated that that the United States should consider diplomatic engagement with North Korea at the "appropriate moment" and under appropriate circumstances. Could you share with us your sense of what might constitute an appropriate moment and the appropriate circumstances?

Answer. The administration has repeatedly offered Pyongyang an opportunity to improve its relationship with the United States, provided North Korea demonstrates a willingness to fulfill its denuclearization commitments. Unfortunately, North Korea has not shown a genuine interest in constructive engagement with the United States. Instead, it continues to mistakenly believe that it can obtain economic assistance and other concessions while pursuing a nuclear program in defiance of its own commitments and obligations and the will of the international community.

North Korea abandoned the six-party talks, has violated its international obligations and commitments, and openly flouts U.N. Security Council resolutions. It is the only country this century to test three nuclear devices and threaten the United States with a nuclear attack. Therefore, North Korea must demonstrate its seriousness of purpose before we would see value in significant diplomatic engagement. We remain open to authentic and credible negotiations to implement the September 2005 Joint Statement and bring North Korea into compliance with all applicable Security Council resolutions. But we are not interested in talks for talks' sake. The onus is on North Korea to take meaningful actions toward verifiable denuclearization and refrain from provocations. We will continue to judge North Korea by its actions, not its words.

As National Security Advisor Rice stated in her November 2013 speech at Georgetown, "we are prepared for negotiations, provided that they are authentic and credible, get at the entirety of the North's nuclear program, and result in concrete and irreversible steps toward denuclearization. Pyongyang's attempts to engage in dialogue while keeping critical elements of its weapons program running are unacceptable." I fully share this view.

*Question.* U.S. Leadership in International Financial Institutions.—While this is ostensibly an issue for the Treasury Department, I am concerned about the potential loss of U.S. leadership in the international financial institutions, such as the IMF, World Bank, and the regional development banks, which we helped to establish. We've seen time and time again the critical role these institutions play in safeguarding U.S. diplomatic and security interests abroad—most recently promoting economic reforms in Ukraine. Despite the fact that the United States championed the 2010 IMF quota and governance reforms, we are now the only major IMF member country that has yet to ratify them. I believe that our failure here weakens U.S. diplomatic influence and has created a space for countries like China to begin crafting new spheres of influence and a new set of institutions that exclude the United States.

♦ I want to flag this for you as a source of real concern to me. Please comment on how the failure to move IMF reforms, and to fully support institutions such as the Ex-Im Bank, affect our diplomatic influence in the world.

Answer. I strongly share your concern. The U.S. failure to ratify IMF reform is undermining our leadership on global economic issues, which have been a central instrument of our influence since World War II. An increasing number of countries are now calling for moving forward on the IMF quota and governance reforms agreed in 2010 without the United States.

We are now the only country holding up the approval of the reform that will embed large emerging economies in the international economic system we designed. Our inaction has helped fuel momentum for regional alternatives. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) nations' New Development Bank excludes the United States. In addition, 21 countries have joined the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), despite our oft-stated concerns regarding its governance structure and its commitment to adhere to international best practices on lending.

U.S. hesitation on IMF reform diminishes our capacity to influence at the IMF and more generally on economic issues. This reduces our capacity to use the IMF to support vital national security and economic interests. The IMF provides critical support to key partners, including to support Ukraine's financial security, prevent financial crises in the Middle East, and fight Ebola in West Africa. Its financial assistance and advice also helps secure foreign economies as markets for U.S. goods and investments and sources of investment in the United States. Giving important developing economies a greater stake in the IMF will preserve the integrity of the existing international financial infrastructure, without increasing U.S. monetary commitments or endangering the U.S. veto over important IMF decisions. It is critical that Congress move forward with the authorization of the 2010 IMF reforms.

With regard to the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im) specifically, its work in the areas of risk protection, credit, and term financing helps advance our economic diplomacy by ensuring that U.S. companies—large and small—have access to the financing they need to turn export opportunities into sales. Ex-Im and U.S. development

finance institutions such as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) are important tools to help U.S. businesses gain footholds in emerging markets, creating U.S. jobs and growth opportunities both at home and abroad. Supporting these institutions not only contributes to U.S. exports and jobs but also helps U.S. products remain competitive internationally, particularly in fast-growing emerging markets.

*Question. India.*—In September, I met with India's Prime Minister in New York and am glad to see that this important relationship appears to be back on track and has such potential for growth. Past Deputy Secretaries have played pivotal roles in advancing this critical relationship—coming out of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Washington, what are your priorities with respect to India and how will you seek to deepen our engagement with New Delhi?

*Answer.* During his visit to Washington, Prime Minister Modi emphasized the priority India accords to its partnership with the United States, a principal partner in the realization of India's rise as a responsible, influential world power. Both leaders committed to a new vision for the relationship, reflected in the mantra "Chalein Saath Saath: Forward Together We Go." We are working with India to bring to fruition our mutual vision that our relationship should benefit not just our two countries, but also emerge as a powerful force of good for peace, stability, and prosperity in the world. We look forward to strengthening our ties in ways that increase prosperity and security in both countries through areas of mutual interest including regional security, defense trade, cooperation on climate change, homeland security and counterterrorism, economic growth, space exploration, and sustainable development.

Defense and security cooperation are pillars of the U.S.-India partnership. If confirmed, I will work to further strengthen the cooperation between our security establishments to help meet the evolving security challenges of the 21st century, including deepening our already strong counterterrorism and homeland security cooperation. I will also work to advance our defense partnership and strengthen our economies by promoting expanded opportunities for coproduction and codevelopment of defense articles.

The United States, including our businesses and universities, can play an important role in helping address the challenges India faces and creating opportunities that benefit both countries. Investing in India's youth through our ongoing community college collaboration and Fulbright-Nehru programs for students and administrators will enable India to realize its full potential and further strengthen India's leadership in promoting global economic prosperity and democratic stability. Additionally, the United States seeks to further develop our trade and investment ties through initiatives including the November 2014 U.S.-India Technology summit, Science and Technology Joint Commission Meeting, meetings under the Commercial Dialogue, and the Trade Policy Forum. These dialogues advance market-opening initiatives that foster both bilateral and regional trade and investment linkages, deepening our relationship with New Delhi.

As Deputy National Security Advisor, I worked closely with the Indian Government, including through my own regular conversations with the Indian Ambassador to the United States, to ensure that the visits to Washington by Prime Minister Singh in September 2013 and Prime Minister Modi a year later advanced our strategic partnership. I look forward to taking our bilateral relationship to new heights if confirmed as Deputy Secretary of State.

*Question. Central Asia.*—The countries of Central Asia are experiencing a wave of renewed Russian assertiveness and unprecedented levels of Chinese economic influence. At the same time, the human rights situation in Central Asia continues to deteriorate.

- ◆ Given the need to reorient our policy in the region as ISAF draws down from Afghanistan, how does the administration plan to leverage our diplomatic, economic, and security resources to promote the development of democratic institutions, human rights, and economic growth in the countries of Central Asia? How can the United States better counter the pervasive influence of Russian media and propaganda in the region?

*Answer.* The United States will continue to advocate to Central Asian governments the need to protect human rights and civil liberties. During my time as Deputy National Security Advisor I met with the Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—two of our important partners in the region—and discussed with them the need to improve governance, to protect human rights, and focused on how good governance and respect for human rights are the foundation for long-term economic prosperity, stability, and security. The administration will promote operating space for independent civil society and stress their valuable role in achieving long-term

stability by serving as a hedge against extremism and popular discontent. The U.S. Government will continue to communicate support for the people of the region broadly, with particular emphasis on the rights of women, ethnic and religious minorities, and members of other vulnerable groups.

The State Department will combat human rights abuses by supporting human rights defenders both through quiet diplomacy and publicly, as appropriate. The United States will raise concerns in multilateral fora such as the UNHRC and OSCE, and will consistently integrate human rights messaging into private U.S. diplomatic engagements. The administration will also continue to support the long-term political liberalization of Central Asian societies through sustained programs in rule of law and institutional reform while cultivating relationships with democratically minded actors, both within and outside of governments. Through U.S. efforts to promote regional economic connectivity, the United States is also seeking opportunities for Central Asian countries to find additional economic linkages and markets with international partners, including through membership in the World Trade Organization.

Besides the unwavering support for a democratic, human-rights respecting Central Asia, the most consistent element of U.S. policy and assistance programs in Central Asia for the past 20 years has been to support the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the five states. That policy will not change, especially with Russia's assertion of a so-called right of protection of Russian-speaking populations and of an "exclusive sphere of influence" in Central Asia. Countering Russian media influence in the region requires a strategy that is sustained and uses multiple lines of activity. The administration will continue to support programs aimed at strengthening independent media in Central Asia to increase the diversity of voices and opinions in the media space. U.S. programs will focus on strengthening journalism capacity and quality in Russian and vernacular languages, so that local broadcasters can attract more audiences and offer citizens alternative, balanced sources of information. The Department of State will also increase people-to-people interactions with Central Asian communities through its public diplomacy and assistance efforts to bolster opinion leaders who understand U.S. policies and values, and amplify our messaging.

*Question.* As the Hungarian Government continues to openly admire authoritarian regimes like Russia and test repressive methods of control over civil society, what steps will the administration take to strengthen democracy and discourage further backsliding in Hungary?

*Answer.* We have raised concerns about the state of Hungary's democracy, both publicly and privately.

For example, we have criticized legislation passed since 2010 that has had a negative effect on democratic institutions and media freedom in Hungary. Earlier this year the United States made several statements at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Permanent Council and Human Dimension Implementation Meeting citing the Government of Hungary's intimidation of civil society and the media. In addition, we have applied Presidential Proclamation 7750 (as well as a similar authority, referred to as the FY 2014 Anti-Kleptocracy Provision) to certain Hungarian officials. Presidential Proclamation 7750 provides authority to suspend entry of certain persons, including current or former government officials, engaged in or benefiting from official corruption. In September, the President cited Hungary in his remarks at a Clinton Global Initiative event on civil society, saying "From Hungary to Egypt, endless regulations and overt intimidation increasingly target civil society." We have taken these steps as a friend and ally of Hungary. Many of our concerns are shared by our partners in Europe, by an array of European institutions, as well as by many Hungarians themselves.

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I will continue this forthright and constructive diplomatic dialogue with the Hungarian Government as well as our efforts to support Hungary's democratic institutions and civil society.

*Question.* European security also means energy security. Europe must diversify its supply and invest in its energy infrastructure. Greater regional cooperation, such as in the Eastern Mediterranean, can help, but Turkey's provocations in Cyprus' EEZ are creating instability that puts at risk further exploration and the placement of projects that would benefit Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike.

- ♦ What actions have you taken and what messages have you sent about Turkey's decision to send its ships into Cyprus' EEZ? What more can and should the administration do to encourage Turkish and Greek Cypriots to resume U.N.-facilitated peace negotiations?



Answer. I share your concern about recent developments and can assure you that the Obama administration remains strongly committed to a just and lasting settlement to reunify the island of Cyprus as a bizonal, bicomunal federation. If confirmed, I will reinforce our diplomatic efforts to achieve such a settlement. We support Cyprus' right to develop its resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and believe that the island's oil and gas resources should be equitably shared between both communities in the context of an overall settlement. Reducing tensions and getting the parties back to the negotiating table as soon as possible are critical to advancing the peace process.

The administration remains fully engaged with all stakeholders to reduce tensions over the EEZ and in support of United Nations Special Advisor Espen Barth Eide's efforts to move past the current impasse and resume negotiations. The Vice President spoke with President Anastasiades on October 31 and underscored our support for the Republic of Cyprus' sovereignty and right to develop resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone, in keeping with customary international law. He also expressed our hope that all states in the region would pursue a mutually beneficial approach to developing energy resources. During the Vice President's November 21-23 visit to Turkey, he discussed with Turkish officials how Ankara can play a constructive role in defusing tensions and getting the talks back on track.

I appreciate your continued support of the settlement process. I assure you of the administration's unwavering commitment to resolving the long-standing division of the island, which we believe will enhance regional stability and prosperity, as well as improve the lives of all Cypriots.

*Question.* A Europe whole, free, and at peace is no longer something we can take for granted. The administration acknowledged this when it announced the European Reassurance Initiative in June, which will ensure a persistent air, land, and sea presence in the region. We must also work with our European allies to ensure they recommit to NATO and to collective security.

- ◆ Given the difficult economic environment in Europe, how should we work with our NATO and European allies to hold member countries accountable to defense spending increases in line with agreements made at the NATO Wales summit in September?

Answer. We continue to press our NATO allies at the highest levels to honor the Defense Investment Pledge agreed at the NATO Wales summit in September, which includes commitments to halt declines in defense spending, as well as aim to spend 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense within 10 years. Allies also agreed that in order to ensure future capabilities, allies should allocate at least 20 percent of their defense spending to equipment, procurement, and research and development. NATO Defense Ministers will be reviewing progress against these benchmarks on a regular basis.

We recognize the financial pressures that our allies face, but cutting defense is not the answer, particularly in the context of the current security environment in Europe. We will continue urging NATO allies to dedicate the resources necessary to ensure NATO's ability to deter and, if necessary, respond to threats.

*Question.* At the NATO Wales summit in September, Secretary Kerry met with the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding renewed fighting in July along the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact. Last week's downing of an Armenian helicopter by Azerbaijan that took the lives of three Armenians reinforces the importance of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and ensuring it does not turn into an all-out conflict.

- ◆ What is the administration currently doing to support the OSCE Minsk Group Talks? Has there been progress in the Minsk Group toward reaching a political settlement? What are the chances an all-out conflict will resume?

Answer. The administration remains firmly committed to a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the OSCE Minsk Group format, and fully supports the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs' efforts to help the sides reach a lasting settlement. The recent meetings of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Sochi, Wales, and Paris were important for revitalizing the most important channel of communication between the sides. At all three summits, the Presidents discussed key elements of a settlement to the conflict, and at Paris, they agreed to continue their dialogue next year under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. As a Co-Chair country, the United States is in constant touch with the sides at the highest levels to facilitate a political settlement.

We are very concerned by the November 12 downing of an Armenian military helicopter along the Line of Contact. The administration continues to urge the sides to avoid an escalation of violence and commit themselves to peace.

*Question.* By any measure, the human rights situation in Azerbaijan has deteriorated over the last year. Freedom House, in its annual Freedom in the World report, determined that freedom declined in 2013, and has stated that the country is in the midst of what some would call the most brutal crackdown on civil society in recent history, citing arrests and attacks against the media, activists, and government critics, as well as travel bans, the freezing of bank accounts, and public smears to silence dissent. According to international NGOs, the Azerbaijani Government currently has over 100 political prisoners. Many in the international community are calling for sanctions against Azerbaijan in response to the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation.

- ◆ Would you support U.S. financial sanctions and travel restrictions against the Azerbaijani Government and any officials who have supported, promoted, or perpetrated human rights abuses?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will urge the Azerbaijani authorities, consistent with Azerbaijan's constitutional and international commitments, to ensure freedoms of assembly, association, and expression; to foster an environment conducive to a vibrant and peaceful civil society; to respect pluralism; and to strengthen judicial independence and due process. I will also urge the Government of Azerbaijan to halt the continuing arrests of peaceful activists, to stop freezing organizations' and individuals' bank accounts, and to release those who have been incarcerated in connection with the exercise of their fundamental freedoms, as previously noted in several U.S. statements to the OSCE Permanent Council and at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. I would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the Senate on these threats to Azerbaijan's long-term stability and security. I look forward to working closely with all partners—domestic and international—to advance respect for fundamental freedoms for all Azerbaijani citizens and ensure that civil society can conduct its work as effectively as possible.

*Question.* Reform in the Middle East.—In remarks on November 17 at the 3rd Annual Transformation Trends Policy Forum, Secretary Kerry said "Even as we mobilize forces to defeat ISIL, we must also encourage measures to reform governance and create opportunity throughout the MENA region. That will not happen by trying to persuade the local population to turn away from its rich spiritual and cultural traditions. Change must develop from inside. But by reaching out where we can, investing in what we can, the United States can help to furnish the leverage that builders within the region seek."

- ◆ If confirmed, what specific policies, programs, and engagements would you recommend to implement this vision for supporting reform? Does the State Department and the broader interagency have appropriate and sufficient authority and funding to move forward in promoting reform? The State Department's FY15 budget request did not include funding for the Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund. Why?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would be a strong advocate for the Department's commitment to a reform agenda that supports greater political and economic opportunity for people in the MENA region. Our diplomatic engagement and assistance programs can bolster the leadership and technical capacities for country reform agendas. Where there are effective local champions, political will and a commitment to reform, our diplomatic engagement and assistance programs can provide support for the realization of these reforms.

Throughout the region, we will continue to engage civil society, government and nongovernment leadership to support reforms aimed at economic growth, democracy, and good governance. In Tunisia we will target our assistance to the development of security and governance institutions and a vibrant economy. Tunisia serves as an example to 330 million Arabs that democracy and Islam are compatible and that their futures are better served by dialogue and compromise. Our assistance to Jordan has supported progress of a home-grown Jordanian political reform program, that has resulted in, among other things, internationally praised national and local elections, constitutional amendments, and the establishment of a National Integrity Commission, an Independent Election Commission, and an Anti-Corruption Commission. Our assistance to Jordan is and will continue to be premised on promoting political and economic reform. We will continue to work with countries that have made tangible commitments to and progress on reform. Regionwide, we will continue our support for civil society and private sector actors pressing for more inclusive political processes and open economic systems.

The Department is committed to increasing economic opportunity for citizens in the region, particularly youth. Youth unemployment is one of the most critical challenges facing the region and we have been focusing our foreign assistance program-

ming to target this complex issue, alongside other donors. We will continue to invest in areas that promote development of the private sector as an engine for growth and a workforce that responds to evolving economies.

In support of these efforts, for FY 2015, the Department requested over \$2 billion specifically to respond to the ongoing opportunities for reform in the region and to respond to the crisis in Syria. These funds would provide humanitarian assistance, support to the moderate Syrian opposition, and economic and governance assistance to countries in the region based on their needs and reform commitments. The administration requested authorities to support reform efforts and respond flexibly to the changing situation on the ground. The Department has also requested budget amendments to address increasing needs in countries bordering Syria and to counter-ISIL. Together, these resource requests reflect a firm commitment to the region and the United States strategic interests there.

*Question.* Iraq.—Since Iraqi leaders came together to form a new government and agree on a new Prime Minister, the United States has used air power to halt ISIL's advance, advised Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Peshmerga forces in order for them to retake territory and strategic assets, and has recently announced the deployment of 1,500 additional U.S. military advisors to Iraq and requested \$1.6 billion to stand up a special Iraqi Train and Equip Fund. Yet, the conditions that led to ISIL's entrenchment in Iraq have not fundamentally shifted: Sunni prisoners still languish in Iraqi prisons, the Iraqi Security Forces remain infiltrated by Shia militias who seemly commit sectarian acts of violence with impunity, and the Iraqi Parliament recently approved a Badr Brigade Member as the new Minister of Interior—this is a group trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards!

- ◆ How will you recommend that U.S. advice and assistance be used to influence responsible Iraqi decisionmaking and encourage Iraq's implementation of an inclusive, nonsectarian agenda? Is the United States willing to withhold support, assistance, and funding for Iraq if these long-standing concerns, which are in the interest of all Iraqis' security and stability, are not addressed?

*Answer.* President Obama this summer made clear that U.S. airstrikes and kinetic action to halt ISIL's advancement into Iraq would not be effective absent forward movement in Iraq's democratic process, aided by the selection of new Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who has committed, through words and actions, to reform the policies of his predecessor and govern in an inclusive manner. U.S. officials, including in my own meetings with the new Abadi government during my visit to Iraq last month, have made clear to the that ISIL cannot be defeated by military action alone; wholesale political reform and inclusive governance are essential to unifying the Iraqi people against the extremist threat and promoting stability in the country.

Already, we have seen significant progress in efforts at reform. One of Prime Minister Abadi's first actions in office was to abolish the Office of the Commander in Chief, an office that had centralized control of the security command structure under former PM Maliki. PM Abadi also successfully completed the formation of his government on October 18, securing the confirmation of security ministers, to include a prominent Sunni Minister of Defense, for the first time in 4 years. The completion of Abadi's government represented the outcome of a political compromise to which all major components of Iraq's polity agreed. The new Minister of Interior, Mohammed Ghabban, is a member of the Badr Corps political party, which performed strongly in the recent parliamentary elections. His selection was indicative of successful political compromise between differing political blocs to choose a candidate that was both popular among Shia factions and acceptable to Sunni blocs in Parliament. Among Minister Ghabban's first acts in office were visits to Qatar and Saudi Arabia to discuss cooperation with those states as well as with Iraq's other predominantly Sunni neighbors.

Though progress remains an uphill battle, within 5 weeks of completing his government, PM Abadi has taken significant and decisive action to enact political and security reforms aimed at uniting the country. On November 12, Abadi continued forward momentum by removing 36 high-level military commanders in an anticorruption drive and appointed 18 new commanders, including Sunnis, to high level positions.

Through concerted engagement, many Sunni tribes have also joined the government in the fight against ISIL and are entering agreements to be incorporated into the ISF. On November 11, the Government of Iraq (GOI) presided over a ceremony marking an agreement to arm and compensate over 3,000 Sunni tribesmen, thereby formalizing their role in the fight against ISIL and affirming the GOI's commitment to include Sunnis in the process. The Abadi government also is committed to creating a National Guard as a mechanism to engage Sunnis in the defense of their own communities, with full support from the state. At the same time we engage to

support Sunni inclusion in security forces, we have also made clear, privately and in public statements, concerns over unregulated Shia militias, the necessity to regulate all armed groups, and the importance of holding individuals accountable for human rights abuses. Senior GOI officials and Iraq's most prominent religious leaders agree and have stressed similar in public statements.

Significant work, however, remains to be done. In every interaction with senior GOI officials, Ambassador Jones, other State Department officials, and I stress the priority of finding political solutions to the ISIL problem, emphasizing that a key element to the success of defeating ISIL in Iraq is the improvement of the socio-economic conditions that allowed ISIL to foment. This includes additional political reform to address Sunni grievances and additional respect and promotion for human rights. Iraq's inclusive new government has pledged to enact reforms and stamp out corruption that has marginalized Iraqis of all ethnicities and religious sects and has taken initial steps to deliver on its promises.

U.S. security assistance, which comprises the preponderance of our support to Iraq, is targeted to enable Iraq to better combat terrorist groups, including ISIL. This assistance is also important in helping Iraq continue to protect its oil production capabilities, which are vital not only for supporting the Iraqi Government's finances, but also for the health of the global economy.

U.S. assistance also serves U.S. goals; further limiting or conditioning it would reduce our progress toward those goals and undermine our influence in Iraq. Even without the ISIL threat, U.S. security assistance provides an important vehicle for cementing the United States enduring partnership with Iraq. Security cooperation on critical systems provides a basis for a long-term relationship.

I assure you your concerns are being heard, and political reform and respect for human rights remain policy priorities, which are supported through robust assistance programs. However, conditioning our assistance could hinder progress toward our goals in Iraq, reduce our influence, and undermine U.S. national security interests. If confirmed, I would welcome working closely with the committee to make our assistance as effective as possible and to advance the reforms necessary to Iraq's progress and stability.

*Question.* Syria.—Recent reporting suggests that al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate the Nusra Front is coordinating on the ground in Syria with ISIL. While this may not be a strategic alliance, the decision by these extremist groups to coordinate even tactically on the ground introduces serious complications for the "ISIL first" strategy and a threat to the moderate Syrian fighters we are seeking to empower with the train and equip program. Further, earlier this month Nusra Front ousted U.S.-backed opposition fighters from Idlib province in northern Syria, dealing the moderate opposition a serious blow.

- ◆ What are the specific implications of Nusra Front-ISIL cooperation in Syria, and how will this affect our strategy to dismantle and defeat ISIL? Further, the train and equip program is intended for U.S.-backed fighters to defend their communities and fight ISIL. But given recent developments, are there any moderate fighters left in northern Syria for us to train? If reauthorized, the train and equip program for moderate Syrian fighters will not deliver effects on the ground for the better part of a year. What can we do in the interim to empower the moderates in Syria?

*Answer.* Defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a complex challenge. We are working closely with other members of the anti-ISIL coalition on multiple lines of effort. This is a multiyear strategy that will need sustained support. Potential cooperation between Nusra and ISIL does not alter our strategy to counter ISIL: as we have said in the past, defeating ISIL will take more than just military might; it will require us to address the issues of foreign fighters, terrorist financing, supporting moderate partners on the ground to provide basic governance and counter extremist ideology. Weakening ISIL in each of these ways will make their areas of operation less hospitable for extremists of all stripes, including Nusra.

We are also increasing our assistance to the moderate opposition in Syria, which is fighting both ISIL and Nusra. As we move forward with the Department of Defense train and equip program for the moderate opposition, we do not anticipate a shortage of moderate recruits. We will tap into an already existing pool of Syrians who have repeatedly expressed a desire to receive assistance to help defend their communities and facilitate a political solution to the crisis. We will also seek to link the military train and equip effort to civilian opposition leadership at both the local and national level and to enable these civilian structures to provide basic governance, including rule of law and essential services, to their communities.

*Question.* Yemen.—How can U.S. assistance and engagement support the newly formed technocratic government in Yemen to move forward with political reconciliation?

*Answer.* The United States daily, on-the-ground engagement in Sanaa has been critical to keeping the political transition process on track and continuing to counter the shared threat from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) despite the current very difficult period. Our continued engagement and assistance programs will help enable the government to better provide basic services and support for its population, nearly half of whom live in poverty, and help it to defend itself from internal and external threats. Our current support to Yemen's health and education sector and our support to its military and security services contribute to this goal. Coordinating closely with others in the region and among the international community, we are supporting the new government's efforts to work broadly with all political constituencies as it seeks to successfully implement the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC Initiative), the National Dialogue Conference outcomes, and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement.

We are working with the Yemeni Government and international partners to ensure that urgent reforms are completed as part of the political transition. Our efforts will better enable support to a strong, capable government that can show all of Yemen's political factions that only through consensus and cooperation will the country be able to overcome its challenges.

*Question.* What are the implications of the Libyan Supreme Court's ruling that the House of Representatives is unconstitutional? Please describe U.S. policy and engagement to date in Libya, and what specific, additional measures would you recommend to encourage movement toward a political solution?

*Answer.* Our recognition of the Libyan Government currently headed by Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani remains unchanged as we study the November 6 Supreme Court decision. Libyans themselves have many questions about the Court's decision. Our priority is to seek a political solution that helps the Libyan people build a national government and a national consensus on the path forward. Thus we urge Libyan leaders to participate constructively in U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Bernardino Leon's work to develop that consensus. Those who engage in or provide support for acts that threaten the peace, stability, or security of Libya may be designated for sanctions under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2174, and those associated with al-Qaeda or its affiliates may be designated for sanctions under U.N. Resolution 2161.

Ambassador Deborah Jones and her staff are engaging with a full range of Libyans from our Embassy in Valletta, Malta, in coordination with other international envoys to build support for SRSG Leon's effort. Similarly, a wide range of senior Washington-based officials are engaging Libyans and other partners to build support for the U.N.'s efforts.

*Question.* The administration has invested heavily in building an anti-ISIL coalition that includes not only Western governments but also regional governments including many Arab States and Turkey. However, there is tension within the coalition as many regional coalition members as well as Syrian Opposition Coalition President Hadi al-Bahra have criticized the administration's "Iraq first" strategy of confronting ISIL to be addressing a symptom of the violence in and around Syria rather than the cause, which they consider to be the Assad regime and its unrelenting attack on its own people.

◆ If confirmed, how will you work to manage this tension within the coalition?

*Answer.* Since the President's September 2014 establishment of the global coalition to counter ISIL, the U.S.-led coalition has grown to more than 60 partners. Coalition partners are working together across multiple mutually reinforcing lines of effort including military support, stopping the flow of foreign fighters, countering ISIL's financing and funding, addressing humanitarian crises, and de-legitimizing ISIL's ideology. With a coalition this large and this diverse, of course there will be some differences of opinion on strategy, but the threat that ISIL represents—to Iraq, to Syria, to the broader region, and to the global community—has galvanized coalition focus and solidarity and inspired the coalition to take action to counter ISIL in both Iraq and Syria. We will continue to work to balance the different capacities and concerns of our coalition partners as we move forward on our campaign against ISIL, including through kinetic strikes in both countries and by building the capacity of partners on the ground—the Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga in Iraq, and the moderate opposition in Syria.

In all these efforts, we are working hand in hand and consulting closely with coalition partners, and senior U.S. officials have dedicated significant time and energy

to building and sustaining the counter-ISIL coalition and will continue to do so. The President, Vice President, the Secretary, the National Security Advisor, and I have all worked with our coalition counterparts as we advance implementation of our strategy. Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, John Allen, and his deputy, Brett McGurk, have been traveling through the region almost nonstop for the past few months doing the serious diplomacy that is required to keep this coalition strong and united. This will be a complex, long-term campaign, and we will continue to work closely with all our global coalition partners to listen to their ideas and concerns and to refine our strategy as necessary in our shared efforts to degrade and defeat ISIL.

As for the conflict between the regime and the opposition in Syria, Assad has created the conditions that have allowed ISIL and other extremist groups to flourish, and it is clear that Syria can never be stable under his leadership. As the President has said, Assad lost all legitimacy a long time ago. We continue to call for a negotiated settlement that leads to a political transition and that addresses Syrians' legitimate grievances. Though our efforts in Syria currently are focused on countering ISIL, our support to vetted, moderate elements of the armed opposition will enable it to act as a counterweight to ISIL and the regime and ultimately to help create the conditions to end the civil war in Syria.

*Question.* In May Assistant Secretary Roberta Jacobson testified before this committee that the unrestricted trafficking of drugs through Venezuela constituted a national security threat to the United States. On top of that, this year, we've seen the Venezuelan Government use its security forces and judiciary to punish political dissent, leading to 43 deaths, more than 50 documented cases of torture, and thousands of unlawful arrests. Additionally, while high profile political prisoners, like Leopoldo Lopez, remain in prison, where he is subjected to cruel and degrading treatment, not one member of the government has been held accountable for their role in systematic human rights violations. Although this committee passed bipartisan legislation requiring enactment of targeted human rights sanctions, administration officials asked us to delay further action.

♦ Do you believe that congressional action should still be delayed? (FOLLOW-UP)  
Will you advocate for more forceful executive action—including asset freezes and visa revocations—against human rights violators in Venezuela?

*Answer.* The administration has already taken steps such as imposing visa restrictions on government officials who are believed to be responsible for or complicit in human rights abuses. We need to look at all options to find the most effective way to encourage the Venezuelan Government to respect democratic principles and the human rights of its citizens. The most effective efforts are those taken in conjunction with partners. We will continue to work closely with others in the region to support greater political space in Venezuela, and ensure the government lives up to the hemisphere's shared commitment to the promotion of democracy, as articulated in the Inter American Democratic Charter.

As I noted during my hearing, if confirmed, I would look forward to working with Congress to build on the administration's actions to date and determine what we can do to go further, including through legislation. We should not take any options off the table. Financial sanctions have proven effective in some situations, and could potentially be a useful tool, if targeted toward specific individuals and entities and used in concert with diplomatic efforts to advance specific U.S. foreign policy goals. We would not oppose moving forward with additional sanctions, and if confirmed, I would review our options under existing authorities and work with Congress to promote alignment between executive and legislative measures aimed at promoting improved human rights conditions in Venezuela.

*Question.* Turkish President's Recep Tayyip Erdogan history of both anti-Semitic remarks and actions are deeply troubling. For example, his recent statements that Israeli actions in Gaza were more barbaric than the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and accusations of Israel committing genocide in Gaza, were factually wrong and deliberately inflammatory. The State Department rightly condemned them. President Erdogan must understand that such words and deeds not only hinder the cause of peace but also make it difficult for Congress to support further defense sales, training missions, or trade promotion with Turkey.

♦ How will you respond should President Erdogan make further anti-Semitic statements?

*Answer.* We are deeply concerned by anti-Semitic statements made by Turkish leaders and engage directly at all levels to express our disapproval of such statements. As you note in your question, we have publicly and privately condemned President Erdogan's unacceptable remarks claiming Israeli actions in Gaza were

more barbaric than the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis, which were self-evidently wrong, unhelpful, and distracted from efforts to bring an end to the violence. President Obama most recently discussed our concerns over anti-Semitism in Turkey with President Erdogan during their September 5 meeting in Wales and the Vice President raised these same concerns during his visit to Turkey last week. Our Ambassador and Embassy officers also meet regularly with the Jewish community to discuss their concerns over security and religious freedom, and to promote inter-faith dialogue. If I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I will not hesitate to denounce anti-Semitic statements, from wherever they emanate. We will also continue to engage with Turkish officials and urge them to promote tolerance and avoid anti-Semitic rhetoric.

*Question.* Tunisia.—Tunisia is the closest thing to a “success story” with regard to democratic nation-building to come out of the events of Arab Spring, especially after the successful parliamentary elections held there a few weeks ago. It is certainly in the U.S. national interest to support Tunisia’s path to democracy and an important example to other peoples in the region still struggling to create inclusive, representational governments of their own.

- ◆ What are the U.S. political, economic, and security interests in, and goals for, Tunisia? How does the U.S. strategy for engagement and assistance align with these objectives? What types of U.S. assistance, security and otherwise, have been most effective since 2011 in addressing Tunisia’s security challenges and promoting economic and political reform, and an active civil society?

*Answer.* Tunisia’s transition offers hope for genuine democratic change in North Africa and the Middle East. Ensuring Tunisia’s stability through economic, security, and governance support is important to U.S. national interest due to its strategic location, and as a counterbalance to ISIL’s violent and extremist behavior elsewhere in the region. Increased economic engagement, through supporting private sector investment and economic reforms, will be central to supporting the Tunisian Government’s efforts to drive sustained growth and employment and diversify its trade.

In the security sector, \$150 million in U.S. security assistance has helped the Tunisian military and other security agencies reorient their focus from one geared toward conventional threats to one capable of addressing asymmetric challenges. Tunisia is also a partner in the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) announced by President Obama at the U.S.-Africa summit in August, which provides a vital avenue to support Tunisian work to strengthen civilian and military security institutions. Overall, the Tunisians have made considerable strides, but need to do more and will look to the United States for expertise and support.

The provision of nearly \$1 billion in external financing secured with sovereign loan guarantees, including U.S. assistance, has been an important U.S. support mechanism for Tunisia. The United States has used these loan guarantees as a means to incentivize Tunisia’s reform efforts. Encouraging private sector investment is also critical to Tunisia’s long-term stability. Foreign assistance programs are geared toward promoting a culture of entrepreneurship and linking youth with private sector employment. Additionally, the U.S. Government is supporting the March 5, 2015, North Africa (PNB-NAPEO) Investment and Entrepreneurship Conference in partnership with the Aspen Institute, which will seek to drive critical private sector investment in Tunisia.

We also believe that intensifying contact between Americans and Tunisians, especially Tunisia’s increasing youth population, are extremely important and we have therefore expanded scholarship and exchange programs with Tunisia.

U.S. assistance for democratization and governance initiatives, through support to the Tunisian elections and political party-building, as well as for increasing the participation of marginalized groups in the political process, contributed to the parliamentary elections that Tunisians and the international community have widely seen as credible and legitimate. Staying engaged with Tunisia in building responsive government institutions and promoting the role of civil society will remain critical as Tunisia moves into the next phase of its democratic transition.

RESPONSES OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BOB CORKER

*Question.* In your testimony you said: “We liberated the people of Libya from a tyrant; now, we must work with the new government to fill a power vacuum and address that country’s turmoil.”

- ◆ Does the U.S. Government still recognize the Tobruk-based government and the Libyan House of Representatives to be the sole legitimate governing authorities

in Libya? If so, what steps will the U.S. Government take to isolate their Tripoli-based rivals? If not, what steps will the U.S. Government take to put pressure on all sides in Libya's current political impasse to ensure their commitment to a political solution?

- ◆ How does the U.S. Government view the HOR's endorsement of General Khalifa Haftar's military operations?
- ◆ Under what circumstances would the United States Government consider taking military action against terrorist targets in Libya? Under what authority? Which groups presently operating in Libya are subject to the 2001 AUMF?

Answer. Our recognition of the Libyan Government currently headed by Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani remains unchanged as we study the November 6 Supreme Court decision. Libyans themselves have many questions about the Court's decision. We remain committed to helping the Libyan people achieve national consensus on the path forward, and continue to urge Libyan leaders to engage productively with U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Bernardino Leon to develop that consensus. Those on both sides of the conflict who engage in or provide support for acts that threaten the peace, stability, or security of Libya may be designated for sanctions under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2174, and those associated with al-Qaeda or its affiliates may be designated for sanctions under U.N. Resolution 2161.

Libyans and the United States share real and serious concerns about terrorist activities in Libya. Counterterrorism operations should be overseen by a government that draws its authority from a clear and broad popular mandate to have the best chance of success. That is why we support SRSG Leon's effort to create a national political consensus before the violence in Libya grows worse.

We regularly assess terrorist threats to the United States and our interests, in Libya and elsewhere. Before conducting any military action, the United States would ensure that it had sufficient authorities for the operation.

Over the past 2 years, the United States has conducted two operations in Libya that underscore our Nation's commitment to protecting our citizens. In October 2013, U.S. Forces captured Abu Anas al-Libi, a senior al-Qaeda figure, indicted for his alleged role in al-Qaeda's conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals and conduct attacks against U.S. interests worldwide, including the East Africa Embassy bombings in 1998. In June 2014, the U.S. military, in cooperation with law enforcement personnel, captured Ahmed Abu Khattalah, indicted for numerous offenses arising from his alleged participation in the September 2012 terrorist attacks in Benghazi, Libya, which led to the deaths of four brave Americans.

*Question.* The administration is seeking \$165 million in additional ESF and PKO funding to support the Syrian opposition as part of its anti-ISIL OCO request for FY 2015. How will the proposed uses of these funds differ substantively from previous U.S. support to opposition groups? What has past U.S. support tangibly achieved?

Answer. The \$165 million in additional resources for Syria requested in the counter-ISIL FY 2015 OCO budget amendment, combined with the President's FY 2015 budget request, will ensure that sufficient resources are available to build the capacity of moderate partners inside Syria as they seek to counter ISIL, provide local security and governance in their communities, and help foster the conditions that can lead to a political transition. These additional resources would work in parallel with the Department of Defense efforts to train and equip vetted, moderate Syrian opposition fighters, and to ensure that there is an effective, moderate governance structure within which a new military force will operate.

Current U.S. support to the moderate opposition is positively impacting the lives of Syrians on a daily basis. For example:

- *Support to local governance institutions:* The United States provides operational funding to support more than 25 local councils and civil society organizations to enable them to respond to community needs and improve governance in liberated areas.
- *Training and equipment to enhance the capacity and cohesion of local councils and civilian activists:* The United States has trained over 1,400 civilian activists and councilmembers from over 300 opposition councils and organizations. The United States has also trained more than 500 Syrian women running as candidates for local and provincial councils and to play a role in international and community-driven peacebuilding efforts. These initiatives help to mobilize and build the capacity of citizen groups, enhance information-sharing, provide community services, and strengthen local governance.
- *Supporting Civil Defense:* The United States has provided over \$12.6 million in civil defense equipment for emergency first responders. This includes the provi-



sion of 155 trucks and vehicles such as ambulances and fire trucks in addition to search and rescue kits and supplies to establish emergency shelters. This life-saving assistance allows civil defense teams in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqah to provide emergency response to attacks on civilians.

- *Technical expertise and immediate repairs to restore water, electricity, and agriculture that benefit more than 100,000 Syrians.* Working closely with Syrian engineers, relief committees, and local councils, the United States has assisted farmers, small businesses, and communities to reinstate economically viable activities through repair of equipment, facilities, provision of spare parts and alternative technology to improve the agricultural based local economies.
- *Support for Civil Society:* The United States supports hundreds of nascent Syrian civil society organizations working on a broad range of issues in support of local governance efforts, including: relief and recovery, education, trauma healing, human rights documentation and promotion, peace-building and reconciliation, and transitional justice.
- *Support for Independent Media:* The United States supports nine FM radio and two satellite TV independent media stations. This support enables Syrian journalists to counter regime and violent extremist narratives, laying the foundation for inclusive tolerant debate.
- *Non-Lethal Support to Moderate Armed Opposition:* The United States is supporting vetted elements of the moderate, armed opposition to enhance their operational capabilities to better protect the Syrian people. For example, we have provided more than 550,000 MREs, more than 4,500 medical kits, vehicles, pickup trucks and buses, armored SUVs and ten-ton trucks to help improve their logistical capabilities.

*Question.* On October 10, you said that the sanctions imposed on Russia could be eased; however, as you know, easing the sanctions would allow Russia to create a “frozen conflict” in eastern Ukraine without cost, and I believe there must be permanent consequences for the annexation of a neighboring country’s territory.

- ◆ What do you think should be the conditions for easing sanctions on Russia both today and in the future?
- ◆ Regardless of the situation in eastern Ukraine, do you believe that most of the sanctions should not be lifted as long as Putin continues to illegally occupy Crimea?

*Answer.* The President has clearly said we will not accept Russia’s occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea or any part of Ukraine. We will continue to work with our allies and partners to impose costs that respond to Russia’s actions, including in Crimea.

Any decision on a rollback of sanctions would depend on Russia’s actions. We have said that sanctions can begin to be rolled back if Russia fulfills its commitments, including implementing the Minsk agreements, and works to reach a lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict. Implementing the Minsk agreements would require Russia to restore Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in eastern Ukraine, including by removing all Russian troops and equipment, returning the Ukrainian side of the international border to Kiev’s control with an effective border monitoring mechanism, and releasing all hostages. We have been equally clear that if Russia continues its unacceptable and destabilizing actions, the costs for Russia will continue to rise.

*Question.* Can you please describe how the administration’s recently approved Central America strategy will help the region secure sustainable economic growth and how your strategy relates to the Alliance For Prosperity plan announced by the Presidents of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador?

*Answer.* Over the course of the past 18 months, the U.S. Government has taken a hard look at both our approach and our investments in Central America. We determined that a comprehensive focus on security, prosperity, and governance is critical to changing the region’s trajectory. This will involve expanding our current security programs and adding a new emphasis on prosperity and governance, and we are working across the U.S. Government to do so. Our approach is intended to encompass the entire Central America region, not just the countries of the Northern Triangle, because we believe that the region’s future lies in its economic integration to create a single market of 43 million people. The leaders of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras appear to have reached similar conclusions for their subregion, as reflected in their own coordinated plan, a historic effort that all three countries agreed on.

On November 14, the Vice President addressed a conference hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank on “Investing In Central America,” directly chal-

lenging the three Presidents to take concrete steps to address problems such as corruption, and pledging that if they can demonstrate such political will, the United States will lend its support to help them address the underlying causes of migration through U.S. assistance and by rallying international support for the Central American plan. Secretary of Commerce Pritzker reinforced this message when she addressed business leaders and the Central American Presidents during the same conference, stating that if they would take the necessary actions we could mobilize support for private sector investment in the region.

The U.S. Strategy for Engagement with Central America therefore both aligns with and supports the overall objectives of the Alliance for Prosperity plan. However, our effort is broader because we also realize that all seven Central American nations must act together for the benefit of the region.

The U.S. Strategy for Engagement with Central America prioritizes prosperity, governance, and security. These objectives are interrelated and interdependent, and attention to each objective is necessary for success. Specifically, our prosperity agenda fosters integration of a regional market of 43 million people so that local businesses can become more competitive and the region can be more attractive to international investors. Economic growth should reach everyone, not just the well-connected few. Our efforts will promote better education and vocational training for all citizens, including women and vulnerable ethnic groups, and business environments friendly to entrepreneurs, providing alternatives to the illicit activities that contribute to insecurity and undermine effective governance.

*Question.* Does the administration currently have a clearly articulated and consistent policy on negotiating 123 Agreements, or is it done on a case-by-case basis?

- ◆ What criteria or standards are used to determine the starting and ending point for each agreement?
- ◆ Are the same criteria and/or standards applied to each new negotiation? If not, why not?
- ◆ How do U.S. national security concerns, including regional assessments of the potential for further nuclear proliferation, affect the administration's approach to negotiating 123 Agreements?

*Answer.* We use our 123 Agreement negotiations to achieve a broad range of non-proliferation commitments with our partners, and we employ a variety of bilateral and multilateral measures in addition to 123 Agreements to help minimize the spread of enrichment and reprocessing technologies globally. The administration believes that by applying a principled approach to implementing nonproliferation commitments in 123 Agreements, we will maximize our ability to achieve the lowest number of sensitive fuel cycle facilities worldwide while raising global nonproliferation standards. This principled approach allows for flexibility in structuring the legal and political commitments while meeting the requirements of U.S. law and maintaining our principled stance on enrichment and reprocessing (ENR).

Our approach has been effective in convincing states to rely on the international market for nuclear fuel services, rather than develop domestic ENR programs. Regardless of the region or the state in question, if we are not sufficiently convinced that concluding a particular 123 Agreement would meet our policy goals on ENR, we will not conclude the agreement. When negotiating agreements, we take into account all relevant factors, including the state's nonproliferation record, its technical capabilities, and any regional proliferation issues.

*Question.* Is the administration concerned that the recent nuclear agreement with Iran—in which Iran is permitted to retain enrichment capabilities—undermines our ability to meet U.S. nonproliferation objectives, including in future 123 Agreement negotiations?

- ◆ Why should countries, such as United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, be asked to accept a gold standard agreement when the administration has capitulated to the enrichment demands of bad actors like Iran?
- ◆ What message does an inconsistent standard for negotiating 123 Agreements by the United States send globally?
- ◆ Does one standard exist for the Middle East and a different standard for the Asia-Pacific?

*Answer.* The United States has a long-standing policy of preventing the spread of enrichment and reprocessing (ENR) technologies; any comprehensive deal with Iran will not change that underlying policy. The United States employs a range of measures, both multilateral and bilateral, to help prevent the spread of ENR technologies around the world. Legally binding commitments added to the peaceful nuclear cooperation (123) agreements are not the only means to combat the pro-

liferation of ENR. In fact, the strong nonproliferation provisions already required in our 123 Agreements have helped to restrain the further spread of ENR for decades.

The key ENR issue when negotiating 123 Agreements is how to prevent states that do not already possess these technologies from acquiring them, and limiting their spread in those countries that do possess them. For countries without an existing enrichment program, we seek to ensure that states make the choice to rely on the international market for nuclear fuel services.

Our approach has been effective in convincing states to rely on the international market for nuclear fuel services, rather than develop domestic ENR programs. Regardless of the region or the state in question, if we are not sufficiently convinced that a particular 123 Agreement would meet our policy goals on ENR, we will not conclude the agreement.

In line with the Obama administration's long-standing policy opposing the spread of enrichment and reprocessing (ENR) technologies, the Joint Plan of Action halts progress on the most worrisome elements of Iran's nuclear program and rolls it back in key respects, including by limiting Iran's enrichment capacity and diluting or converting Iran's stockpile of near-20-percent low enriched uranium.

Iran mastered the fuel cycle and began enriching years ago. We cannot eliminate that knowledge. With respect to the ongoing negotiations, any long-term, comprehensive deal acceptable to the United States must effectively cut off the various pathways Iran could take to obtain fissile material for a nuclear weapon. Other countries are not likely to follow Iran's path, which involved decades of isolation, global sanctions, and, should a comprehensive agreement be reached, would require long-term and unprecedented constraints on its program.

*Question.* Along the same lines, why does the administration not begin all negotiations at a consistent start point, such as the gold standard?

*Answer.* We begin all 123 Agreement negotiations with the same objective of minimizing the spread of enrichment and reprocessing (ENR) technologies, and we structure possible legal and political commitments in the agreement to meet the requirements of U.S. law and maintain our principled stance on ENR. We also pursue additional mechanisms to support achieving our objectives. These include, for example, legal or political commitments to rely on the international market for nuclear fuel services rather than acquiring sensitive nuclear technologies, or to participating in bilateral or multilateral nonproliferation activities, such as adherence to the Nuclear Suppliers Group Guidelines, implementation of an IAEA Additional Protocol to a state's safeguards agreement, and support for the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Fuel Bank and other fuel assurance mechanisms.

*Question.* Given the recent actions of the Russian Federation, including the bomber patrols near U.S. waters and the relentless positioning of nuclear forces, is it still this administration's intention to attempt to negotiate further nuclear force reductions with the Russians rather than work to bolster U.S. defenses?

*Answer.* The United States remains committed to pursuing a responsible approach to nuclear disarmament in keeping with our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) commitments and supports reductions in all types of nuclear weapons: strategic and nonstrategic, deployed and nondeployed. The United States has made clear our readiness to discuss further nuclear reductions with the Russian Federation, but progress requires a willing, trustworthy partner and a conducive strategic environment. This includes a willingness by Russia to adequately address our concerns about its violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

As we go to lower numbers, we are committed to maintaining a safe, secure, and effective arsenal that ensures effective deterrence and strategic stability. This includes making needed investments to modernize the aging cold-war-era nuclear infrastructure, which is essential to fulfilling the President's goal of reduced reliance on nuclear weapons.

The administration is pursuing an overhaul of the nuclear weapons enterprise, to include development of replacement weapons delivery systems for all elements of the triad, life extension programs (LEPs) and updates of all our existing nuclear warhead types, and modernization of nuclear weapons production facilities. Following the recently completed Defense Nuclear Enterprise Review, the administration is committed to spending several billion dollars over the next 5 years to sustain the enterprise and to ensure personnel serving in the nuclear forces have the resources and support they deserve to conduct their vital deterrence mission.

In the face of growing North Korean missile capabilities, the administration moved in 2013 to strengthen homeland missile defense by announcing plans to deploy 14 additional ground-based interceptors (GBIs) at Fort Greely, AK, by 2017, a

nearly 50-percent increase in our homeland missile defense capability. We are also continuing to test and improve the GBI, particularly the CE-II kill vehicle.

In addition, the administration is pressing ahead with all three phases of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) missile defense system that protects our NATO allies and U.S. Forces in Europe. We have deployed a radar in Turkey, two Aegis BMD-capable ships to Rota, Spain, with plans for two more in 2015, and are currently establishing an Aegis Ashore site in Romania that will be operational in 2015. Plans for the deployment of a second Aegis Ashore site in Poland in 2018 remain on schedule. We are also working with a number of NATO allies, bilaterally and in the NATO framework, to encourage them to acquire their own missile defense capabilities.

*Question.* In pursuing New START, the administration deflected efforts by Russia to link strategic offensive and defensive systems as they sought binding restrictions on our missile defenses. Does the administration continue to take the position that our missile defense systems are absolutely nonnegotiable? How has this position affected the Russians' interest in pursuing a follow-on treaty? What plans is the administration making to further shore up our Eastern European partners with missile defense technology?

*Answer.* The administration has consistently informed Russia that the United States will not agree to constrain or limit U.S. ballistic missile defense capabilities.

The United States has made clear our readiness to discuss with the Russian Federation further reductions that cover all types of nuclear weapons. This includes the proposal made by President Obama last year in Berlin to reduce deployed strategic nuclear weapons further, up to one-third from the level established in the New START Treaty. But progress in negotiating such reductions requires a willing, trustworthy partner and a conducive strategic environment.

Regarding plans the administration has for missile defense cooperation with European partners, the United States is committed to implementing all three phases of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). The United States has already deployed a radar to Turkey, two Aegis BMD-capable ships to Rota, Spain with plans for two more in 2015, and is currently establishing an Aegis Ashore site in Romania to be operational in 2015. Plans for the deployment of a second Aegis Ashore site in Poland in 2018 remain on schedule.

We are also working with a number of NATO allies, bilaterally and in the NATO framework, to encourage them to acquire their own missile defense capabilities. Acquiring these capabilities would be in addition to their substantial monetary contributions to the NATO command and control system. In the case of Poland we are actively supporting Raytheon's effort to sell its PATRIOT PAC-3 Air and Missile Defense system to Poland.

*Question.* There are a number of significant concerns with regards to the Russian track record of compliance with their current arms control obligations. Why should the United States continue to engage in negotiations on yet another arms control agreement or stringently implement other agreements while the Russians are less than sincere about their compliance with current commitments?

*Answer.* The United States remains committed to pursuing a responsible approach to nuclear disarmament in keeping with our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) commitments and supports reductions in all types of nuclear weapons: strategic and nonstrategic, deployed and nondeployed. The United States has made clear our readiness to discuss further nuclear reductions with the Russian Federation, but progress requires a willing, trustworthy partner and a conducive strategic environment. This includes willingness by Russia to adequately in a verifiable manner address our concerns about its violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Current tensions with Russia highlight the importance of the predictability and confidence-building provided by arms control treaties and their associated verification regimes. This is especially the case with the continued successful implementation of the New START Treaty and the security and predictability provided by verifiable mutual limits on strategic nuclear weapons.

The New START Treaty enhances our national security and strategic stability with Russia, and both the United States and Russia are successfully implementing the treaty's inspection regime. As certified in the 2014 New START implementation report, Russia is in compliance with the New START Treaty. Similarly, it remains in the interest of the United States and our allies to continue implementing treaties and agreements that contribute to security and confidence building in the Euro-Atlantic region such as the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document. We take questions about compliance with arms control treaties very seriously and are con-

tinuing to monitor Russian compliance with all its arms control obligations. With respect to the INF Treaty, we believe the treaty serves the mutual interest of the United States, our allies, and Russia. We will continue our diplomatic efforts to urge Russia to return to verifiable compliance with the treaty, and we will not cease to raise this matter until it is resolved. We will also continue internal planning and coordination with allies to take into account the impact of this Russian violation on our collective security in the event Russia does not return to compliance and to take appropriate steps to address threats to our security.

RESPONSES OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

*Question #1.* In March 2012, you said: "What's beyond debate is that Iraq today is less violent, more democratic and more prosperous—and the United States more deeply engaged there—than at any time in recent history." You testified in your nomination hearing that, at the time you made this comment, you believed it was true.

◆ With the benefit of hindsight, do you believe the judgments reflected in that statement, in full or in part, were incorrect?

Answer. I stand by my statement. In March 2012, Iraq was less violent, more democratic and more prosperous than it had been at any time in its recent history.

By 2012, violence in Iraq had been in steady and sustained decline for several years. The core metric used by the United States Government to measure violence—"weekly security incidents" (attacks against civilians, the government, and diplomats)—was down from an average of 1,600 a week at the end of 2007 and early 2008 to 100 a week in 2011–2012. The Shiite militia had stood down; indeed, what had been frequent rocket and mortar attacks against the United States Embassy went to zero. Al Qaeda in Iraq was in retreat—its main leaders had been killed, while suicide bomb attacks had dropped from an average of dozens a month to five a month.

Iraq was increasingly prosperous. Oil production—the lifeblood of Iraq's economy—was up 50 percent from 2005, to almost 3 million barrels per day, providing the revenue that enabled lawmakers to pass a \$100 billion budget in February of that year.

Iraq was more democratic. Following the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011, the United States maintained an unwavering commitment to the development of Iraq's nascent democratic institutions and continued support for the democratic process, including successful national elections. By 2012, politics had supplanted violence as the dominant means for the country's various factions to settle their disputes and advance their interests. There were repeated political crises—over the election law, the election itself, the de-baathification process, the formation of the government. But instead of leading to renewed sectarian violence, Iraqis, until that point, resolved each of those differences through the political process, with quiet but continuous support from the United States.

Iraq's political leadership and the rise of ISIL in Syria forfeited much of this progress. We repeatedly warned the Iraqi Government that while AQI was down, it was not out and it was imperative to sustain pressure against them. Despite our repeated efforts, the Iraqi Government refused our assistance in the fight against AQI/ISIL until 2013, when the group had become entrenched and suicide bomb attacks jumped from 5 a month to 50 a month. Starting in early 2013, the Iraqis quietly began to accept our help—we established a targeting cell in Baghdad, resumed ISR flights, significantly increased the provision of weapons and provided technical advice. When Prime Minister Maliki visited the White House in November 2013, President Obama told him that the biggest threat Iraq faced was ISIL, that the United States was willing to provide even more counterterrorism support, but that only a comprehensive approach—especially addressing the legitimate grievances of the Sunni community—could be effective. But the Maliki government turned increasingly sectarian, playing to its base in the runup to elections in 2014. ISIL took advantage of the polarization to lay siege to Fallujah and Ramadi and ultimately to take Mosul.

Yet even in the midst of the growing ISIL crisis, on April 30 of this year, over 20 million Iraqis went to the polls to cast their ballot in a democratic election, determined to be fair and free by U.N. and EU elections monitors. Voter turnout was 62.2 percent, outpacing much of the region, despite significant attempts by ISIL to scare citizens away from the polls. The Iraqi determination to participate in the democratic process, in spite of countless obstacles, affirms the resilience of a more democratic Iraq. Following the election, we saw extensive negotiations on govern-

ment formation, the peaceful transfer of power from former PM Maliki to PM Haider al-Abadi, and a Cabinet confirmation process that ensured Sunni, Kurdish, Shia, and minority leaders had a seat at the table. While Iraqi determination sealed the country's commitment to democracy, the United States played no small role in encouraging the elections to be held on time and supporting technical training and development of election monitors, poll workers, and senior officials.

*Question #2.* Can you provide any examples of judgments that you and your administration colleagues have made in your policy toward Iraq and Syria that you now believe were wrong, and what lessons you have learned from those mistakes?

*Answer.* Yes. Let me start with some context. By 2012, the Iraqi Security Forces were more numerous and better trained and the Iraqi Government more confident it could maintain security on its own, supported by a robust U.S. security assistance program. As noted in Question #1, violence in Iraq was significantly down, the Shiite militia had stood down and what was then Al Qaeda in Iraq was in retreat. And politics seemed to have supplanted violence as the primary means by which different groups advanced their interests.

Nonetheless, we were deeply concerned that AQI remained a potential threat. Throughout 2012, we tried but did not succeed in focusing the Iraqi Government in sustaining proactive pressure on AQI. From early 2013, the committee that I chair, the Deputies Committee, met more than a dozen times on the question of increasing support to Iraq to deal with AQI and then ISIL. The Principals Committee and the National Security Council met multiple times on the same issue. Slowly and quietly, Iraq began to accept our offers of assistance, as noted above. But by then ISIL had developed significant momentum and Iraqi politics had turned increasingly sectarian, despite repeated warnings from the administration that a failure to address legitimate Sunni grievances would exacerbate the ISIL threat.

In retrospect, while we were focused on the emerging ISIL threat, we underestimated the weakness of the Iraqi Security Forces in their ability to respond during the June ISIL takeover of the city of Mosul and overestimated our ability to convince the Government of Iraq to heed our advice on political and security considerations, which further undermined the effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces.

This lesson, amplified by our experience in Libya, informed our current approach to Iraq. As President Obama has said, we and our European partners underestimated the need in Libya to have an answer for the day after Qaddafi, including a viable political process and a coherent force to fill the security vacuum, despite repeated efforts to secure Libyan support for a robust training program and/or an international force to help keep the peace. That's why President Obama this summer conditioned launching our comprehensive counter-ISIL campaign in Iraq on seeing a new, inclusive government committed to reform. We knew that U.S. airstrikes and kinetic action to halt ISIL's advance into Iraq would not be effective or sustainable absent forward movement in Iraq's democratic process, aided by the selection of new government and Prime Minister committed, through words and actions, to reform the policies of the Maliki administration and govern in an inclusive manner. And we have made clear to the Abadi government that ISIL cannot be defeated by military action alone, that wholesale political reform and inclusive governance are essential to unifying the Iraqi people against the extremist threat and promoting stability in the country. Already, we have seen significant progress in that direction.

*Question #3.* Are there any circumstances in which you would recommend to the President that he order U.S. troops into a combat role in Iraq or Syria?

*Answer.* Yes. I can certainly imagine hypothetical circumstances in which our military commanders might advise the President to deploy combat troops to fight in Iraq and I would second that advice. For example, if our Embassy was in imminent danger of falling to ISIL or the group had acquired a weapon of mass destruction and our military advised that U.S. troops in a combat role were necessary to contend with the problem, I would join their recommendation.

In the current campaign against ISIL, U.S. troops in a combat role are neither necessary nor advisable. The Iraqi Security Forces, the Kurdish Peshmerga and Sunni tribes already have demonstrated that they can be effective on the ground, especially when we provide air power, intelligence, training, equipment, advice and assistance. The Iraqi Government has made clear it does not want U.S. troops in a combat role in Iraq. The campaign will be more effective and sustainable if Iraqis are the ones doing the fighting on the ground to secure their own country.

*Question #4.* To what extent has the collapse of Iraqi forces in June 2014 and resulting security conditions in Iraq prompted the administration to reevaluate its current troop withdrawal plan for Afghanistan?

Answer. It is important to learn from experience, and to be guided by historical lessons. In formulating our policy in Afghanistan, we have looked to lessons learned from Iraq and other conflicts. That said, I don't believe that we can lump Iraq and Afghanistan together. These are different countries, with unique histories, political and economic realities, and regional dynamics. We have to deal with each country with an understanding of what makes it different than others. Getting this balance right is of course a challenge, but one we must face.

The primary lesson of Iraq is the need for political accommodation—it was a failure of the political process that pushed Iraq over the edge and created space for ISIL, and that's what Afghanistan needs to avoid. That is why Secretary Kerry and the administration invested so heavily in forging a post-election compromise between the two leading candidates to govern together and inclusively. It is a point we have been stressing to President Ghani and CEO Abdullah, as we concurrently reassure them of our commitment to sustain our sizeable investments in the ANSF, consistent with the Tokyo commitments. Fortunately, President Ghani and CEO Abdullah have made it clear that they fully share this view and are acting on it, including just recently agreeing to a diverse allocation of Cabinet positions.

Our planning for the U.S. role in Afghanistan is based on our long-standing discussions with the Afghan Government, our NATO allies and other international partners. Beyond 2014, the United States will continue two narrow missions in Afghanistan. First, the United States and NATO will transition to a noncombat mission of training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Second, the United States will continue to maintain a counterterrorism capability in Afghanistan to target the remnants of al-Qaeda and disrupt other extremists who directly threaten the U.S. homeland, U.S. persons overseas, and allies.

The President's national security team has been defining the operational and legal details required to continue executing those missions in 2015 within the scope of the Bilateral Security Agreement we signed in September with the Government of Afghanistan. These recommendations were recently passed to the President, who approved them.

*Question #5.* Do you believe that a conditions-based withdrawal would be more effective in securing long-term stability in Afghanistan?

Answer. The United States has pursued a conditions-based drawdown of our forces in Afghanistan, insofar as we have steadily built up and then transferred security responsibilities to the Afghan Government over the past 6 years. The conditions we helped to create were increased Afghan capacity. But a timetable also helped keep the pressure on the Afghans to assume that responsibility, and not take for granted a U.S. presence in perpetuity. It is important that they know in advance what responsibilities they must assume and when they must assume them. Ultimately, we cannot do for Afghans what they must do for themselves.

At the same time, we and our NATO allies agree on the need to continue to support the ANSF, the Afghan Government, and the Afghan people. To that end, the United States has committed to a long-term partnership with Afghanistan based on our Strategic Partnership Agreement and on the recently signed Bilateral Security Agreement. The United States and NATO will transition to a noncombat mission of training, advising, and assisting the ANSF. The United States also will continue to maintain a counterterrorism capability in Afghanistan to target the remnants of al-Qaeda and disrupt other extremists who directly threaten the U.S. homeland, U.S. persons overseas, and allies.

While the U.S. combat mission will end this year, we will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan as it pursues a future of peace, greater prosperity, and an end to conflict. To the extent that Taliban members directly threaten the United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan, provide direct support to al-Qaeda, or pose a strategic threat to Afghan Security Forces, we will take appropriate measures to keep Americans safe and assist the Afghans.

*Question #6.* In June, President Obama argued that destroying ISIS in Iraq required the removal of then-Prime Minister Maliki and the establishment of an inclusive new government. Why does this not equally apply to Assad in Syria? Does destroying ISIS in Syria not also require the removal of Assad and the establishment of an inclusive government in Syria?

Answer. As Secretary Kerry noted recently, the relationship between Assad and ISIL is symbiotic; they feed off each other. Assad has done little to combat the ISIL threat and has, in fact—through his regime's brutality toward its own people—been a key factor in spurring ISIL's growth. President Obama has said repeatedly that Assad long ago lost all legitimacy and must step aside for Syria to establish an in-

clusive government. But the President and Secretary also have been clear that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. Our goal is helping the Syrian people reach a negotiated political transition that fulfills Syrians' aspirations for freedom and dignity—a future without Assad or ISIL.

That's why we have supported the moderate opposition and are in the process of ramping up that aid, together with our partners. The Department of Defense program to train and equip vetted, moderate elements of the Syrian opposition, which Congress has authorized, and which Saudi Arabia and Turkey, among others, have committed to support, will further enable us to bolster the moderate opposition, and put it in a position to defend itself against ISIL and regime forces; stabilize areas under its control; and, by shifting the balance on the ground, help create the conditions for a negotiated transition.

*Question #7.* Is the administration's "ISIS first" approach in Syria benefiting the Assad regime? If yes, does this not contradict the administration's stated political goal to transition from Assad to an inclusive government?

*Answer.* The threat that ISIL represents—to Iraq, to Syria, to the broader region, and to the global community—and U.S. leadership have mobilized an international coalition of more than 60 countries to take action to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Assad has been at war against the moderate opposition since long before the ISIL campaign. Our increased support to vetted, moderate elements of the armed opposition in Syria through the Train and Equip Program that Congress authorized and other efforts, will enable it to act as a counterweight to ISIL and also more effectively defend itself against the regime and ultimately help create the conditions to end the civil war in Syria.

*Question #8.* What kind of political transition in Syria is the administration discussing that does not remove Assad from power?

*Answer.* We are not discussing with any of our international or Syrian partners, or the regime itself, any political transition process that envisages Assad remaining in power. Our objective remains an inclusive, legitimate government for all Syrians; we are supporting those Syrians who share that goal. As President Obama has reiterated, Assad stands in the way of political transition, lacks legitimacy, and needs to step down so that Syrians can achieve a democratic, just, and inclusive government. And as Secretary Kerry noted recently, we will work with Syrians who strive to empower moderates against the extremes of both Assad and ISIL.

*Question #9.* Do you share the concerns that Secretary Hagel has reportedly expressed—that we may not be able to succeed against ISIS if there is not a clear strategy toward Assad?

*Answer.* Our strategy toward Assad is clear. We are strengthening our support for the moderate opposition, in part, so that it can advance the conditions for a political transition that ultimately results in Assad's departure. The goal of such a transition would be an inclusive government capable of serving the interests of all the Syrian people.

Defeating ISIL is a complex challenge that requires a multiyear strategy and sustained support. The United States and coalition partners—Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—have conducted more than 450 airstrikes in Syria. We are focused on degrading ISIL, denying it safe haven, and disrupting its ability to project power by taking away its freedom of movement and resupply in ungoverned spaces, particularly in eastern Syria. The degradation or destruction of ISIL targets in Syria limits the terrorist group's ability to lead, amass forces, and conduct operations. We believe that the moderate opposition must be part of the solution to the twin challenges of ISIL and Assad: over time, it can serve as the ground force that, together with coalition airstrikes, can counter ISIL; and it also can act as a counterweight to the Assad regime and help facilitate a negotiated transition.

*Question #10.* Do you believe the United States can maintain public support among Syrians for the fight against ISIS without doing more to prevent Assad's war against them?

*Answer.* The Syrian people rose up against Assad in 2011 to demand basic human rights and freedoms. The administration supports these demands, and has backed members of the moderate opposition in pursuing them. It is clear that the moderate opposition has the will to fight ISIL and defend the Syrian people against the regime; they are doing both of these things now. However, they require our assistance in this struggle. We have provided significant nonlethal assistance to date to the political and military opposition, and continue to do so. We will also, through the Department of Defense's Train and Equip Program, provide lethal assistance



and training to vetted, moderate fighters to defend themselves against ISIL and the regime, hold territory, and to empower a subset of fighters to take the fight to ISIL. These efforts will better enable the opposition to defend itself against the regime.

At the same time, no one knows better the brutality and barbarity of ISIL than those people living in areas that they currently control. Beheading, slavery, and rape are commonplace. Throughout Syria and Iraq, local populations who may have initially been supportive of ISIL's presence as a counter to Assad are now seeing this terrorist group for the inhumane butchers that they are.

*Question #11.* The President and other administration officials have repeatedly condemned the Assad regime's barbaric use of so-called barrel bombs against civilian populations. And yet the attacks not only continue; they are increasing since U.S. air strikes in Syria began. Is the administration planning to take any action to stop these attacks? If no, how does the administration expect the 5,000 Syrians who have been trained and equipped to succeed against ISIS without protecting them and their families from Assad's airstrikes and barrel bombs?

Answer. This is something we're working every day with our friends and partners in the region. We have provided extensive support to the moderate opposition and are working with Congress, the Defense Department, and regional partners to significantly expand that support so that moderate fighters will be in a better position to defend populations against ISIL and the regime—including its use of barrel bombs—and to create the conditions for a political settlement.

The United States, through the Department of State and USAID, complement those efforts with continuing nonlethal support to moderates, armed and civilian, to provide governance, rule of law, and basic services.

*Question #12.* I am sure you are aware of the numerous reports of Sunni tribal forces who have risen up to fight ISIS, but have been slaughtered by the hundreds, in large part because they are not getting the assistance they need to succeed. These Sunni tribal elements were integral to our success against Al Qaeda in Iraq during the war, as you pointed out in your testimony. They are equally important in the fight against ISIS now.

- ♦ What programs has the administration put into place to help empower Sunni tribes and other Sunnis that want to end Islamic State control over their communities?

Answer. Support from Sunni tribes in countering ISIL is both critical and necessary. The President has made clear his commitment to supporting greater cooperation between Sunni tribes and the Iraqi Government, and empowering tribal fighters and the Iraqi Security Forces to combat their common enemy ISIL. The President raised this with former Prime Minister Maliki over a year ago when they met in Washington, and the President and Vice President Biden continued to urge the Iraqi Government, including in multiple meetings and phone calls with Prime Minister Abadi, to make Sunni outreach a priority. I did the same during my most recent visit to Iraq in October.

The United States has encouraged the Iraqi Government to not just cooperate with Sunni tribes, but to take concrete steps to integrate tribal fighters into the Iraqi Security Forces. This integration would help address some grievances raised by Sunni communities, including their desires for local security control and salaries and benefits for those fighting to protect them.

A major component of this integration effort is the development of a National Guard. This effort aims to establish a security structure that draws from local recruits and allows them to protect their own communities, while being tethered to Baghdad through the provision of salaries, weapons, and equipment. This effort is also a critical part of security sector reform and seeks to develop a durable security arrangement that will help Sunni communities trust the forces protecting them as well as empower communities and tribes to provide their own security. We are strongly supportive of this initiative and have been working for months to help bolster support for the program among Iraqi leaders. When I visited Iraq in October, there was strong consensus support for this effort from all the leaders with whom I met, and we continue to work with the Iraqis to refine the program and to move forward with the necessary steps, and legislative action in the Council of Representatives, to implement it.

In the meantime, Sunni tribes face an immediate and constant threat from ISIL. The recent massacre of hundreds of members of the Abu Nimr tribe highlights the brutality of ISIL's actions against Sunnis. While the National Guard program is developing, we are urging the Iraqi Government and Sunni tribes to move forward on a bridging mechanism to begin the integration process as soon as possible so that tribal fighters can receive the weapons, equipment, and training they need to

counter ISIL. Earlier this month, Iraqi Government officials traveled to Al Asad Air Base in Anbar province to hold a conference with hundreds of Sunni tribal leaders and representatives to discuss this bridging mechanism. In the weeks since, we have seen the process of integration begin with Iraqi forces starting to integrate hundreds of Sunni fighters, and we will continue to press all sides to continue and increase this effort.

To support our commitment to help build the capacity of Iraqi forces, including Sunni forces, the President has authorized the additional deployment of up to 1,500 military personnel to train, advise, and assist Iraqi forces. This deployment includes personnel to Al Asad Air Base to support Iraqi efforts to develop and execute operations to counter ISIL. This U.S. presence in Anbar province will continue to support the integration of Sunni tribal fighters and to facilitate coordination between the Iraqi Government and Sunni tribes in their common fight against ISIL.

*Question #13.* Do you believe that Putin's actions in Ukraine constitute an "invasion" of the country?

Answer. As we have said consistently, Russia is blatantly violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and its actions—including repeated armed incursions into Ukraine and its support for the Separatists—have been profoundly destabilizing. There is a fundamental international norm at stake, which is that sovereign states must respect the borders and territorial integrity of other sovereign states. This is enshrined in the U.N. Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. Russia has acted in a way that violates international law and long-standing norms as well as its own commitments to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. That is why the United States has mobilized the international community to impose significant costs on Russia for its actions in Ukraine and will not relent until Russia, through its actions, respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

*Question #14.* Do you believe that the costs that we and our allies are imposing on Russia are sufficient to deter further aggression by Putin against Ukraine?

Answer. A key element of our strategy for dealing with Russia's continuing violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity has been raising the costs on Russia for its actions in order to deter further such actions. The United States has galvanized support from the EU, G7, and other international partners to impose and sustain such costs, including political isolation and economic sanctions. At critical moments, that pressure has created space for Ukraine to hold the most successful elections in its post-Soviet history and to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union, which is what sparked the Maidan movement in the first place.

Sanctions, and the uncertainty they have created in the market, are having a significant impact, directly and indirectly, on Russia's already weak economy. The Kremlin's actions in Ukraine and the international response to them have sparked significant capital flight, had a chilling effect on foreign investment, driven the ruble to its lowest levels ever, sharply constrained the ability of Russian companies to float bonds and raise money, fueled inflation and driven growth to zero. Russian companies face a looming credit crunch—Russian banks and firms have to repay \$134 billion in external debt between mid-November and the end of next year, \$32 billion of which comes due this December alone. Both the IMF and Russian Ministry of Economy expect capital outflows to reach \$100 billion in 2014 and the IMF predicts that outflows will remain elevated in 2015. In October alone, the central bank's reserves declined by over \$28 billion as it attempted to cushion the currency's decline in the face of sanctions and lower oil prices; the ruble has lost around a quarter of its value since we imposed our first round of targeted sectoral sanctions in July.

Over time, our carefully coordinated and targeted sectoral sanctions will have even deeper impacts. For example, Russia is no longer able to acquire the cutting edge technology it requires to further develop energy exploration and exploitation.

President Putin has found that Russia's aggression in Ukraine is the subject of every multilateral gathering he attends. There is no doubt in the market of our resolve to follow through on our pledges to impose further costs on Russia if it continues its destabilizing actions in eastern Ukraine. If Russian authorities continue their aggressive actions and violations of international law, the costs will only continue to rise.

*Question #15.* Do you think the lack of lethal military support for Ukraine encourages further Russian aggression?

Answer. While Russia has continued its destabilizing actions in Ukraine, Putin's aggression has been met by a united front by the United States and our European partners. We have imposed serious costs on him, which over time will reveal the losing hand he is playing. We have prioritized the unity of this effort with Europe,

because the impact is that much greater when the United States and Europe act together. In the long term, this will be the most effective deterrent to Russian aggression. As I indicated in my testimony, we continue to assess the situation and look actively, every day, at other forms of assistance, including defensive lethal assistance.

But I don't think anyone—not the United States, not our closest allies—believe there is a military solution in Ukraine. What we are doing is raising the costs of the conflict on Russia. That includes sanctions, taken in coordination with our partners, and which are having a significant impact on Russia's economy. But beyond that, we are taking steps to support Ukraine and its ability to determine its own future. To ensure that the Ukrainian military is strengthened and modernized, the United States is providing over \$118 million in security assistance to the Government of Ukraine. This has included body armor, helmets, vehicles and patrol boats, night and thermal vision devices, heavy engineering equipment, advanced radios, demining equipment, countermortar radars, and other items. We are providing equipment and training to assist Ukraine in monitoring and securing its borders, operating more safely and effectively, and preserving and enforcing its territorial integrity. The U.S. EUCOM-led Joint Commission on Bilateral Reform is leading an effort to assess and prioritize Ukraine's needs for all NATO allies and partners, as well as the United States, to improve Ukraine's capacity to provide for its own defense, identifying near-term priorities while setting the stage for longer term defense cooperation. This effort includes a recently concluded visit by medical and security assistance advisory teams.

We are also taking steps to deter Russia from taking further destabilizing actions on its periphery by increasing our support to our partners and allies. The President has asked Congress for \$1 billion to maintain and expand our European reassurance efforts. The European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), which was delivered to the Hill on June 26, proposes increases in U.S. military deployments to Europe. We believe that an expanded and persistent U.S. air, land, and sea presence in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, is a necessary and appropriate show of support to our NATO allies and partners who are deeply concerned by Russia's aggression in Ukraine. In addition, ERI will provide funding for more extensive bilateral and multilateral exercises and training with allies and partners; improvements to infrastructure that will boost responsiveness, especially in Eastern Europe; and enhanced prepositioning of U.S. equipment. A portion of the funding would also help build partner capacity in some of the newer NATO allies and with non-NATO partners such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

*Question #16.* In your testimony you stated that the administration is looking at providing lethal assistance to Ukraine. In these discussions, what circumstances would the prompt the administration to change its current opposition and provide lethal assistance to Ukraine?

*Answer.* I don't think anyone—not the United States, not our closest allies—believe that there is a military solution in Ukraine. What we have to do right now is to take the leverage provided by the sanctions the United States led the Europeans to put in place, and actually achieve implementation of the Minsk agreement. Russia is hurting. As discussed in detail in answer to Question #14, the pressure we've exerted through coordinated sanctions is having a significant and growing impact on Russia. We are focused on getting the Minsk process moving, and if it doesn't we have made it very clear to President Putin that the pressure will only grow. And as I indicated in my testimony, we continue to assess the situation and look actively, every day, at other forms of assistance, including defensive lethal assistance. In that regard, one relevant factor would be whether Russia continues to blatantly violate its Minsk commitments by providing the Separatists with tanks.

In the meantime, we are working closely with Ukraine to help them use the tools they already have more effectively. The U.S.-Ukraine Joint Commission on Defense Reform and Bilateral Cooperation has provided targeted recommendations for NATO allies and partners, as well as the United States, on our next steps in security assistance, including in areas such as generating forces, combat lifesaving care, logistics, and joint operations, to name a few. We are providing near-term, tangible capacity-building assistance while at the same time laying the groundwork for longer term reform to build Ukraine's capacity to provide for its own defense and increase its interoperability with NATO and other Western forces. With your support, we plan to use the President's European Reassurance Initiative to provide Ukraine another \$45 million in FY 2015 to further support our efforts to build Ukraine's defense capacity, in addition to the over \$118 million in training and equipment that we have already committed.

*Question #17.* The remaining \$575.5 million of this year's military aid to Egypt is subject to the Secretary of State certifying that the Egyptian Government "is taking steps to support a democratic transition." What are the metrics by which the administration intends to measure the concrete steps the Egyptian Government must take to certify this condition? At this point in time, does the administration intend to certify that Egypt is taking these steps?

*Answer.* At this time, the Secretary has not made a decision regarding certification with respect to assistance to Egypt. The administration continues to monitor the situation in Egypt and encourage the Egyptian Government to ensure that it upholds constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and worship for all of its citizens. We continue to have concerns about Egypt's political trajectory, including steps that would effectively alienate or disenfranchise significant segments of the opposition, and we have delivered this message at the highest levels. We will continue to press the government to allow civil society to operate freely—including by amending or repealing the Protest Law and passing an NGO Law that ensures freedom of association—and to release jailed journalists and political activists. We believe that Egypt will be more stable and prosperous when all its citizens are allowed to organize in an open, vibrant civil society and express their political views free from government interference.

RESPONSES OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

*Question.* Should the President use his existing authorities to impose financial sanctions on individuals involved in human rights violations in Venezuela?

*Answer.* We need to look at all options to find the most effective way to encourage the Venezuelan Government to respect democratic principles and the human rights of its citizens. The most effective efforts are those taken in conjunction with partners, and we will continue to work closely with others in the region to support greater political space in Venezuela, and ensure the Venezuelan Government lives up to the hemisphere's shared commitment to the promotion of democracy, as articulated in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

With respect to the role of the United States, the administration has already taken steps such as imposing visa restrictions on government officials who are believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, human rights abuses. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with Congress to build on the administration's actions to date and determine what we can do to go further. We should not take any options off the table. Financial sanctions have proven effective in some situations, and could potentially be a useful tool, if targeted toward specific individuals and entities and used in concert with diplomatic efforts to advance specific U.S. foreign policy goals.

*Question.* In your assessment, has the President's strategy against ISIS proven to be effective?

*Answer.* The President's strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL is delivering steady progress. The momentum is shifting in Iraq as the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) increase pressure against ISIL with successful offensive operations. While it is still early in the military campaign, coalition airstrikes coordinated with ISF ground operations have resulted in several successful engagements, including with respect to the Mosul dam, Erbil, Haditha Dam, Rabiya border crossing, and more recently Bayji and Zumar. ISIL is suffering significant losses and has been forced to change its tactics, hurting ISIL's morale and challenging their ongoing propaganda campaigns that fuel foreign fighter recruitment. Military successes, combined with strong leadership by PM Abadi and Defense Minister Obeidi, have reinvigorated the ISF. Through concerted engagement, many Sunni tribes have joined the fight against ISIL and are entering agreements to be incorporated into the ISF, including eventually into a new National Guard. Through our advise and assist and training missions, we will strengthen ISF (including Peshmerga) capabilities to build on initial success and to launch additional offensives to retake ISIL-held territory.

In Syria, the United States and coalition partners Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have conducted more than 400 airstrikes, restricting ISIL's freedom of movement and resupply and ability to project power into Iraq that it has enjoyed inside ungoverned spaces in eastern and northern Syria. Strikes in Kobani, a location where ISIL is concentrating its fighters and materiel, and parts of eastern Syria, particularly Raqqah and Dayr Az-Zour, have degraded ISIL by taking out command and control nodes, finance centers, training camps, and oil refin-

eries that produce gas for its vehicles and a critical source of financing. Targeting in Syria is evolving beyond fixed facilities and now includes more dynamic targeting of a tactical nature, such as vehicles, armored vehicles, and convoys. The destruction and degradation of ISIL targets in Syria further limits the terrorist group's ability to lead, control, amass forces, project power, and conduct operations.

An important part of our strategy in Syria is to continue to build up the moderate opposition, including through the Train and Equip Program authorized by Congress. An effective partner on the ground can fill the space created by coalition air power and ultimately is necessary to deny ISIL safe haven.

Defeating ISIL cannot be achieved through military action alone, however. President Obama's strategy to defeat ISIL also involves comprehensive efforts to dismantle ISIL's financial networks and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters. Working with the coalition, we have degraded ISIL's ability to derive income from illicit oil sales and have cut off ISIL's access to international banking networks. Many countries have enacted or stepped-up enforcement on legislation that criminalizes travel to commit terrorist acts and other activities that support terrorism. We have seen some progress in interdicting the transit of foreign fighters to Syria, but there must be more action. Long-term, we are working with our partners to delegitimize ISIL's ideology and the draw of violent extremism.

A key element to the success of defeating ISIL in Iraq is the improvement of socio-economic conditions that allowed ISIL to foment. Iraq's inclusive new government has pledged to enact reforms and address corruption that has marginalized Iraqis of all ethnicities and religious sects and, since the completion of government formation, has taken initial steps to deliver on its promises. For example, the Prime Minister disbanded the controversial "Office of the Commander in Chief," fired more than three dozen generals who were incompetent or pursuing sectarian agendas and has reached out to the Sunni tribes and the Kurds.

We are encouraged by initial successes that have blunted ISIL's onslaught, but we are aware that significant challenges remain and that we will have setbacks. However, we are certain of the importance of defeating ISIL and are devoted to our mission. As I saw firsthand during my meetings with the new Iraqi leadership in Iraq last month, we have a credible partner in the Abadi government. And we have a broad and committed international coalition.

*Question.* Do you agree that the administration is absolutely obligated by law to get congressional approval to lift sanctions as part of a final deal with Iran?

*Answer.* Terminating legislatively imposed sanctions would require congressional action. However, as we have stated in public testimony and in closed discussions on the Hill, in the first instance we would look to suspend sanctions in order to ensure that we can quickly snap them back into place should Iran fail to meet its commitments. Then, only if and after Iran has upheld its end of the arrangement would we look to lift or terminate sanctions.

*Question.* In your view, does the lack of American lethal military support for Ukraine encourage or deter further Russian aggression?

*Answer.* The United States continues to believe that there is no military resolution to the crisis, and our focus is on finding a diplomatic solution. We support the Minsk cease-fire and the peace plan, and call on Russia and the separatists Russia supports to abide by the agreed measures and seek a peaceful resolution. We have provided significant nonlethal security assistance to Ukraine to help address the crisis. We are constantly assessing the situation and have not ruled out any options, including defensive lethal assistance, depending on how conditions on the ground evolve.

In response to the crisis, the United States is providing over \$118 million in security assistance to the Government of Ukraine. We are providing equipment and training to assist Ukraine in monitoring and securing its borders, operating more safely and effectively, and preserving and enforcing its territorial integrity. This equipment includes night vision goggles, secure communication, protective vests, vehicles and countermortar radar. The U.S. EUCOM-led Joint Commission on Bilateral Reform is leading an effort to assess and prioritize Ukraine's needs to improve its capacity to provide for its own defense, identifying near-term priorities while setting the stage for longer term defense cooperation. This effort includes assessments by U.S. medical and security assistance advisory teams that were completed earlier this fall.

*Question.* What steps is the administration taking to help Moldova preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty?

*Answer.* I visited Moldova with Vice President Biden in 2011. Helping our European partners like Moldova maintain and guard against threats to their sovereignty

and territorial integrity is a priority for the United States. The United States actively participates in the 5+2 negotiations, which seek a comprehensive settlement to the Transnistrian conflict that guarantees Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The United States also continues to advocate for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Moldova's Transnistria region, replacement of the current Russia-dominated peacekeeping force with a genuinely multinational presence under an international mandate, and full access to the region by the OSCE Mission to Moldova, consistent with its existing mandate.

The United States is helping Moldova create a modern, sustainable military force. Our defense officials are in regular contact with Moldova's Ministry of Defense, including visits by high ranking DOD officials over the last year. In FY 2014, the United States provided \$1.25 million for Foreign Military Financing and \$750,000 for International Military Education and Training (IMET) for Moldova. The United States is also working to equip the Moldovan Military with Excess Defense Articles (EDA) from U.S. stocks, including a recent delivery of 49 vehicles (HMMVWs, trucks, trailers) via EDA. If approved, the European Reassurance Initiative could provide an additional \$10 million in FMF to Moldova in 2015 to help build Moldova's military capacity and improve interoperability with NATO and other Western forces.

The United States is also helping the Moldovan Government secure its borders through a \$35 million Defense Threat Reduction Agency Program supporting capacity-building of Moldova's border guards.

*Question.* As you know, the LIBERTAD Act codified into law specific democratic benchmarks that the Government of Cuba must meet before the President begins to normalize relations. Do you anticipate any efforts to normalize relations with Cuba in the next 2 years absent Cuba meeting the democratic standards specified in the LIBERTAD Act?

*Answer.* The administration remains committed to policies that support the Cuban people's desire to freely determine their future, reduce their dependence on the Cuban state, and advance U.S. national interests. We will continue to pursue constructive relations between the United States and Cuba, consistent with U.S. law and with our national interests.

The Cuban Government infringes upon universally accepted rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, harasses members of independent civil society, and has kept a U.S. citizen detained for nearly 5 years for trying to bring Internet access to the Jewish community on the island. As President Obama has stated, the administration will continue to think creatively about how to promote positive change in Cuba. We look forward to the day when the Cuban people are able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms.

*Question.* Do you have any reservations about U.S. programs that help the Cuban people communicate freely without government censorship? If confirmed, will you fully support such programs?

*Answer.* There is no question that if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary I will continue to support efforts to help Cuban citizens communicate more freely with one another and with the outside world.

The Cuban Government continues to unduly limit fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, press, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the free flow of information to, from, and within the island. Although the Cuban Government continues to blame the U.S. embargo for lack of Internet on the island, the Cuban Government limits access to the Internet to a small number of professionals and the party faithful. Cuban restrictions on technologies, monitoring, censorship, and control over who has access to the Internet make Cuba among the least-connected countries in the world.

The President and his administration remain committed to policies that support the Cuban people's desire to freely determine their future, reduce their dependence on the Cuban state, and advance U.S. national interests. As part of our policy, the administration has taken steps to improve conditions for Cuban citizens through initiatives aimed at increasing the free flow of information to, from, and among the Cuban people. U.S. foreign assistance supports this policy.

*Question.* Secretary Kerry has said that the administration would not consider exchanging development worker, Alan Gross, for three Cuban spies that remain imprisoned in the United States, as there is no equivalency in their cases. Is this still the position of the administration?

*Answer.* Alan Gross is an international development worker who was sentenced to 15 years and has been unjustly imprisoned by Cuban authorities for nearly 5

years. He deserves to come home to his family. Securing his release remains a top priority for the administration.

Cuban Government interlocutors frequently attempt to compare Mr. Gross' imprisonment to that of the convicted Cuban intelligence agents from the "Wasp Network," three of whom continue to serve sentences in the United States. Mr. Gross was a development worker, and there is no comparison. His situation is fundamentally dissimilar to those of the convicted intelligence agents.

Cuba's continued imprisonment of Mr. Gross for trying to help Cubans gain access to the Internet is indefensible. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I will use every appropriate diplomatic channel to press for Mr. Gross' release, both publicly and privately.

*Question.* As you know, the Summit of the Americas is coming up next year in Panama. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roberta Jacobson, has said that ". . . the summit process is committed to democratic governance and that the governments that are sitting at that table ought to be committed to the summit principles, which include democratic governance."

◆ Does the Cuban regime meet this standard? In your view, should the President attend if Cuban regime officials attend?

*Answer.* The United States supports the important commitments—especially with respect to democracy and human rights—made at the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec by all of the democratic states of our region. At that summit, all participating governments agreed, by consensus, that a "strict respect for the democratic system" is an essential condition for participation in the Summit of the Americas process. Cuba remains a clear outlier in the region in terms of democratic values and respect for human rights. As a hemispheric community, we should work to promote positive change, democratic reforms, and increased respect for human rights in Cuba.

If confirmed, I will consult closely with the Assistant Secretaries for the Western Hemisphere and Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, as well as other senior Department of State and National Security Council officials, regarding President Obama's attendance. I will engage with summit planners, organizers, and like-minded governments to advocate that the summit include meaningful engagement between leaders and members of civil society and that the summit reaffirms our region's commitment to democracy and human rights, as expressed through the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

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RESPONSES OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEFF FLAKE

*Question.* The President has indicated his willingness to work with Congress on a new authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) to combat ISIL in Iraq and Syria. While the President continues to maintain that there will be no deployment of "combat troops" as part of this fight, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, has testified before Congress that he would not rule out recommending the introduction of combat forces to this fight.

◆ Would you support approval of an AUMF which included a prohibition on the deployment of combat forces in the fight against ISIL?

*Answer.* As the President has stated, our strategy to work with a coalition of partners "to degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL" includes a number of key elements: a systematic campaign of airstrikes in Iraq and Syria; support to forces fighting ISIL on the ground; the use of our substantial counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks; and the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians who have been displaced by this terrorist organization. The President has also made clear that this effort does not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil.

Although the President has the authority to address the threat from ISIL, he has said that we are strongest as a nation when the executive branch and Congress work together on matters involving the use of U.S. military force. The administration is therefore engaging with the Congress on a new AUMF. The goal of this engagement is to produce an AUMF that specifically addresses the current fight against ISIL and, as the President has said, "reflects what we perceive to be not just our strategy over the next 2 or 3 months, but our strategy going forward."

As I noted during my hearing, the administration will continue to engage with the Congress on the elements of an AUMF to ensure that they are appropriately tailored, while still preserving the authorities the President needs to execute his

counter-ISIL strategy and to respond as might be necessary to defend the United States.

*Question.* How would the continued absence of an AUMF approved by Congress affect the coalition the administration has put together to fight ISIL?

*Answer.* The President has been clear that he has the authority to address the threat from ISIL and to build a strong international coalition in support of that effort. The international coalition looks to the United States to continue to provide robust leadership in the fight against ISIL, and we are strongest as a nation—and as the leader of the coalition—when the executive branch and Congress work together on matters involving the use of U.S. military force. We would therefore welcome congressional support for our military efforts to combat ISIL including through a new AUMF. As I noted during my hearing, we want to work actively with Congress to develop one.

RESPONSES OF ANTONY JOHN BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RAND PAUL

*Question.* Earlier this year, in spite of laws prohibiting U.S. assistance to the terrorist organization Hamas, the Obama administration quietly worked to help Hamas circumvent these clear funding prohibitions and join a U.S.-backed Palestinian unity government.

- ◆ Do you believe Hamas is worthy of assistance from U.S. taxpayers?
- ◆ Do you believe this U.S.-facilitated arrangement should continue even if Hamas maintains its refusal to renounce violence or to recognize Israel?

*Answer.* Our position is absolutely clear and unchanged. Hamas remains a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. The United States does not and will not provide any assistance to Hamas nor maintain any contact with members of Hamas.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) government is comprised of independent technocrats; no members of Hamas are a part of this government and we assess that Hamas does not exert influence over the government. Moreover, the PA government has maintained its commitment to the principles of nonviolence and recognition of the State of Israel. We have made clear to the PA government that it must continue to uphold these principles.

Assistance to the Palestinian people is an essential part of the U.S. commitment to a negotiated two-state solution for Palestinians and Israelis, promoting a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It is in the interest of the United States to ensure these efforts continue as they help to build a more democratic, stable, prosperous, and secure region.

The Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2014 enables continued economic assistance to the PA. Our foreign assistance to the PA is provided consistent with this authority.

*Question.* At the same time that the Palestinian unity government was formed, the State Department indicated that “we will be judging this government by its actions.” Since that comment, Hamas has launched thousands of rockets into Israel. In the wake of the November 18 Jerusalem synagogue attack, a senior Hamas official rejected pleas to condemn the violence by reiterating his desire for intifada against Israel.

- ◆ How would you then judge the unity government given these kinds of actions and statements?
- ◆ How do you judge the political legitimacy of Hamas as a participant in that unity government?

*Answer.* We have closely followed the actions of the Palestinian Authority (PA) government of national consensus since its formation in June 2014. The PA government is comprised of independent technocrats; no members of Hamas are a part of this government. We assess that Hamas exerts no influence over the PA government. President Abbas’ goal in pursuing reconciliation and in forming the PA government of national consensus is to end the period of Hamas rule in Gaza and empower the PA to reassert control there.

The PA government has demonstrated its commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of the State of Israel, and acceptance of previous commitments and obligations. Throughout this difficult period in recent months, President Abbas has directed the PA security services to take all possible measures to prevent terror attacks and dismantle terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank. Security cooperation between the Palestinian and Israeli security forces continues. President Abbas and other PA officials have consistently condemned violence, including the horrific



November 18 attack on a synagogue in Jerusalem that resulted in the deaths of three American citizens. As I noted during my hearing, the statement by a senior Hamas official apparently condoning the attack was "a reminder of Hamas' true colors." While we are urging the PA to do more to alleviate tensions on the ground, we recognize that President Abbas remains a key partner for peace.

Hamas has refused to cooperate with the PA consensus government, blocking PA ministers from exercising control over their portfolios in Gaza; preventing PA employees in Gaza from reintegrating into the civil service; and refusing to disarm its military wing and cede control over security and border crossings in Gaza to the PA. We condemned Hamas' deplorable attempts to target Israeli civilians with rockets and mortars this past summer and provided additional missile defense assistance to Israel to help protect millions of Israelis from the threat of rocket fire. Indeed, in the midst of the crisis, Israel's Ambassador to the United States asked to see me urgently late at night at the White House. He conveyed a request from his government for more Iron Dome interceptors. I brought the request to the President the next morning. Within days, the administration made a formal request of Congress for \$225 million in additional funding, which was approved.